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EVERYONE
E
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Mild Violence
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PlayStation 2

www.BruteForceGame.com

MATURE
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Violence
Blood

digitalANViL

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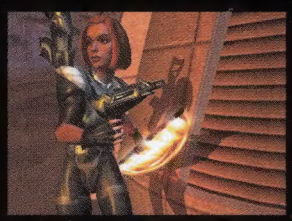

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welcome...

Two big topics this month, as an epic fourth quarter draws near and consoles finally go online. Beginning with Q4 madness: I am often asked by people which console they should buy, which used to be a pretty easy to answer. For "family fun," the best platformers, and first-party epics that keep on giving for people who only buy a few games each year, Nintendo was the obvious choice, while for more serious content, diversity, RPGs, sports, and some of their own platform magic, Sony filled the bill, and, as a result, enjoys a huge lead. Things aren't quite as simple heading into '02's holiday season...

Consider this perplexing predicament for the new or single console owner: Without an Xbox, you'll have no *Shenmue II, Blinx, ToeJam and Earl III, Quantum Redshift, Panzer Dragoon*, or *MechAssault*; ouch, may as well not even buy a tree this year. On the other hand, without a PS2, you can forget about (insert drum roll followed by a gunshot here) *GTA III Vice City, Shinobi, Ratchet and Clank, Sly Cooper, Primal, Getaway, Kingdom Hearts*, and *Tomb Raider*...actual pain now begins to set in. But wait, it gets even crazier. Without a GameCube you'll miss *Metroid Prime* (isn't that illegal?), *Mario Sunshine, Starfox Adventures, The Legend of Zelda*, and the Treasure-developed *Wario World*. So just dig a hole. So, what do I say when people ask me which console to buy? I tell them that for under $550 they can have it all, since I can't imagine it any other way. Strapped for cash? In a bit of a pinch? Here's one solution: First, skip the tree (there's at least a 100, including decor, which always looks like crap anyway). Next, forget about those retarded lights that make your house look like Liberace's pad (there's another 100 with labor, at least, not to mention possible medical bills), and lastly cancel any holiday travel plans you might have made. There's no need to leave home with three consoles sitting there and, well, you'll just end up getting lit and hitting on your cousin anyway. Now you've got more than enough, so you may as well buy all the games I mentioned, too. You can thank me later. Seriously, in the scheme of things, it's a small price to pay for this cornucopia of interactive euphoria—especially when you consider the online applications hot off the assembly line...

Sony grabbed a big head start in the console wars, but versus Microsoft in the online wars, they'll come out of the gate side-by-side, looking to blaze that online gaming trail, console style. In the early going, Xbox Live's decision to go Broadband-only seems a wise one, seeing as how anyone savvy enough to buy a console to go online likely has the capacity to secure a high-speed connection. Sony's success on the dial-up side, however, may attract more users initially. Either way it will be interesting to see how the two fare, especially given the overwhelming number of installed users Sony has compared to Microsoft, although the gap is narrowing (slightly) since the Xbox price drop. It's really all about the hardcore user at this juncture anyway, so it may be closer than you think. Next year when *Halo 2* shows up, things could get interesting. The Sony camp will need some massive guns to stave off that stampede and, knowing them, they will. Imagine the mayhem GTA Online would create. Nintendo will have possibly joined the fray by that time as well, although personally I don't see the need. What Nintendo needs to do is blow-off third party ports altogether and release ten first-party games a year that combined could outsell five times that or more on the competing consoles. Who needs the overhead and headaches when few third parties do more then grossly abuse the privilege? Back to the online wars: given third parties' penchant for the quick fix and cash-in mentality, my hope is that cheesy ill-devised mini-games, playable online, don't begin to grace otherwise single-player games in an attempt to test the waters. "Play online!" stickers plastered on packaging may attract users initially, but if the content is crap, they may quickly cut the chord and the fees that go along with it. Now is the time for quality, not quantity. As well, single-player brands need to remain sacred territory. Online side-stories such as *Final Fantasy Online* will be wonderful, but not in place of actual sequels.

What wonderful problems to have, these fourth-quarter woes. I'm sure by next year we'll have even more perplexing problems to ponder!

"Now is the time for quality, not quantity."

Dave Halverson,
Editor in Chief

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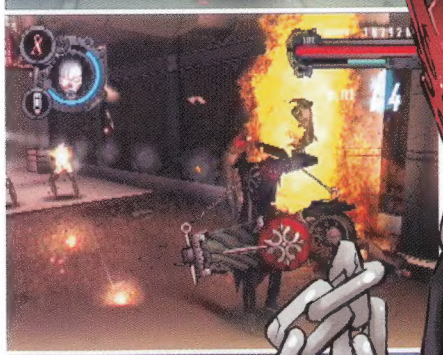

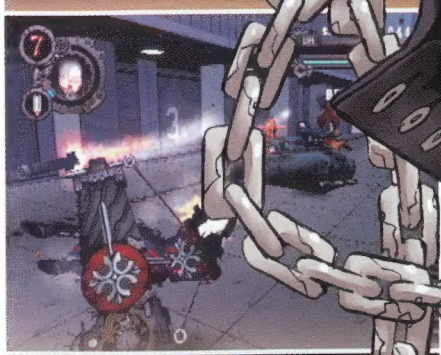

MATURE M CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
BLOOD
VIOLENCE

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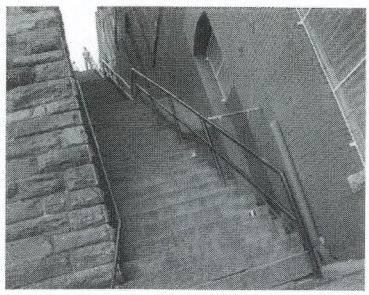
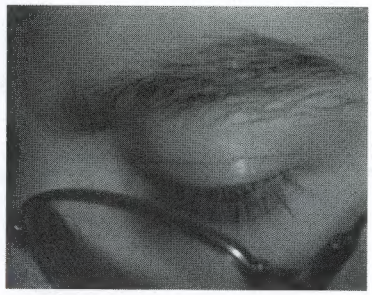


Jon M Gibson
Executive Editor

Jon is, in fact, atop this flight of stairs. Even more eerie is that they bear a striking resemblance to that "fatal" staircase in *The Exorcist*. Nah. Or are they? (Cue frightening music.)

Brady Fiechter
Editorial Director

Life has been a bit of a blur lately, but a little time off has put everything back in perspective for Brady. He's still not sure what that perspective is, though.



Michael Hobbs
Art Director

This month, Mr. Hobbs poses the question, "What if the universe comes to a cold dark end, as recent research seems to show? The idea of an infinite cycle of big bangs and big crunches doesn't seem so likely anymore. Why does the universe exist?"

Nelson Lui
Assistant Art Director

Having just purchased *Super Mario Sunshine*, in order to really get into it—Nelson has completely ex-communicated himself from society. He has, however, taken the time to illustrate for us his current state of happiness. Heyo!

Tom Ham
Contributing Writer

Besides filling up his pallet with game previews and DVD reviews for us, rumor has it that on his time off he pants heavily outside the window of the local Hooters, fogging the glass.

Ashley Wood
Contributing Artist

Ash has been a professional illustrator for 10 years. He also thinks cats *and* breasts are cool (but not cats *with* breasts—that would just be strange)
www.ashleywood.com

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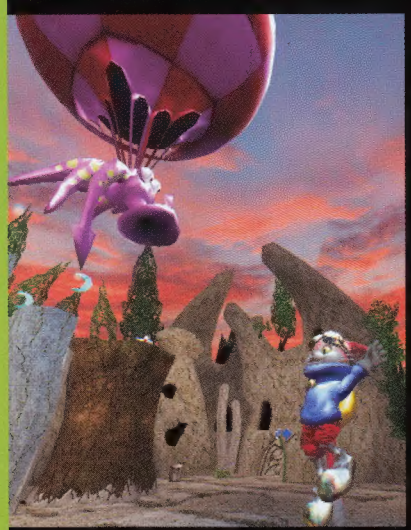

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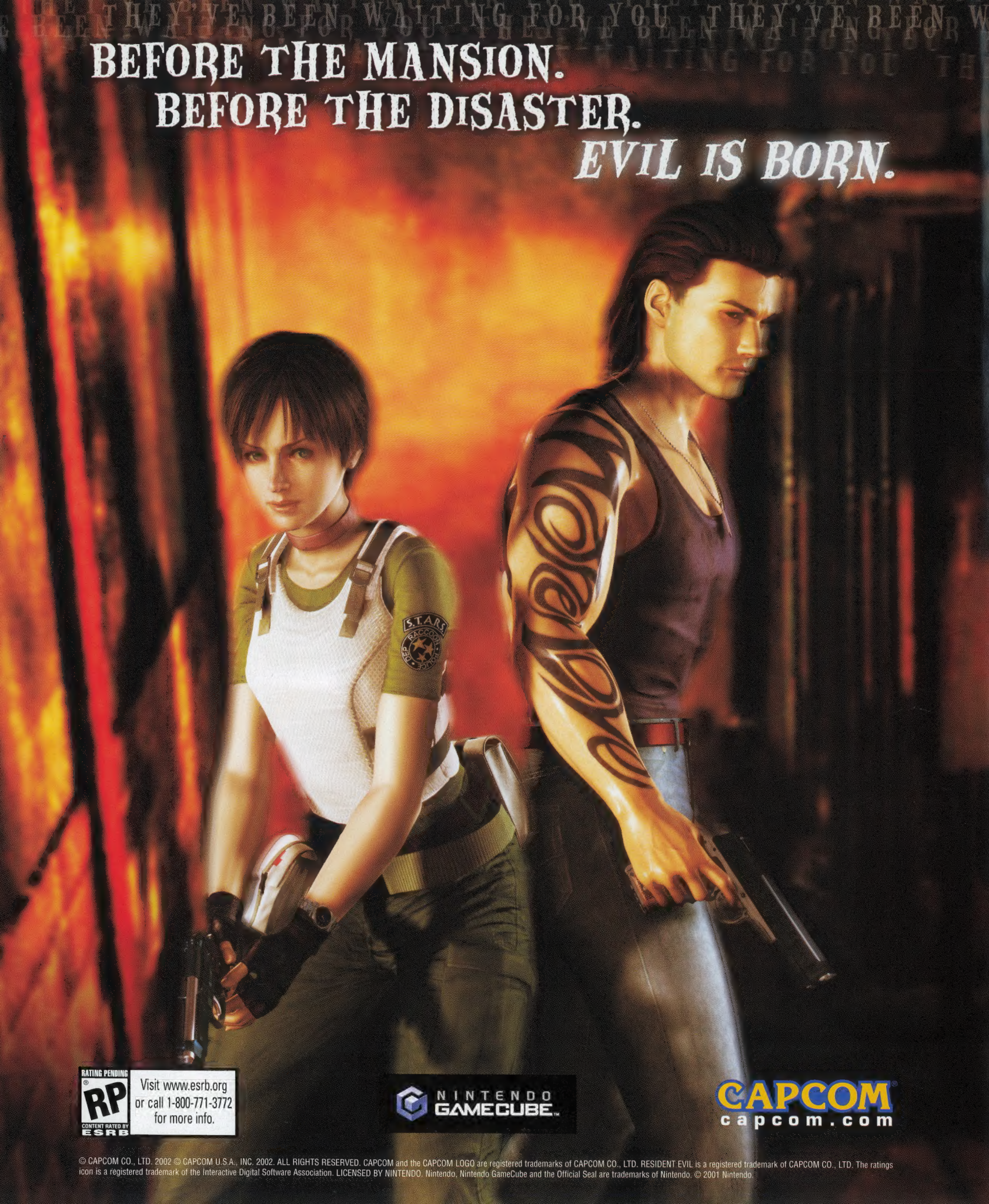

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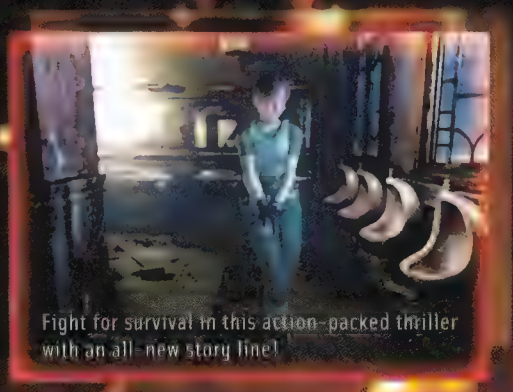

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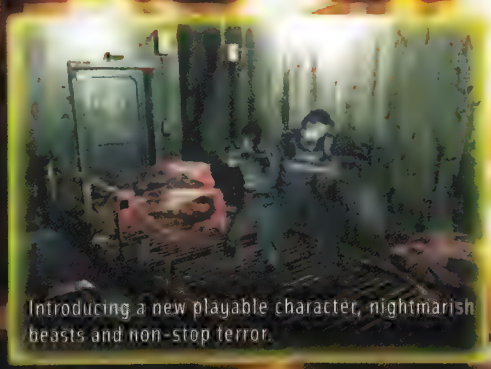

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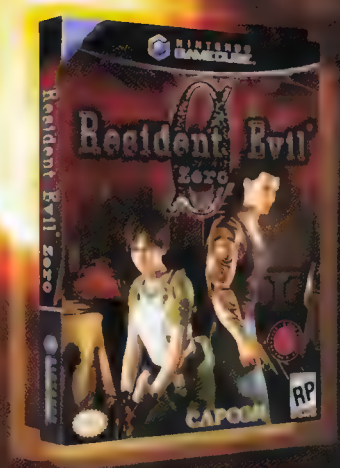

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PlayStation.2 XBOX GAMECUBE GAME BOY ADVANCE

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GET ONLINE, BE HAPPY

Your instant guide to everything you've ever wanted to know about getting online with your PS2 but were afraid to ask...

Gaming's most epic battle has begun and it's being waged right in the middle of your living room. It's the Online War, but it's unlike that of any console clash the market has ever witnessed. There is no home-court advantage. In fact, it's more a theory with a budget than a guaranteed cash cow. When concerning the PC realm, online gaming has proven itself to be highly consumable—log onto any *Counter-Strike* server and witness the popularity; the user base is practically endless, no matter the time of day. But the console environment packs a dramatically different kind of gamer—not to mention, the technology is first-generation.

It will be another two months before Microsoft launches its Xbox Live campaign, but as you read this, Sony has already been marching the battlefield, marked by the release of their much-anticipated PS2 network adapter on August 27. But in case you're weary—or simply don't know what the PS2 has to offer in way of online tech—**play** presents a survival guide for all users, skeptical *or* curious:

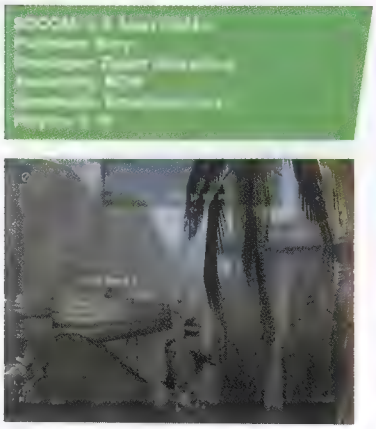
step 1/ hardware

Network Adapter
Price: $39

Pack-ins: Along with the easy-to-install hardware kit (simply screw it in to the back of your PS2 with a nickel), the included start-up disc will prime you for your first online console foray. Playable demos of *Frequency Online* and *Madden 2003* will give you a taste of what's available on store shelves, and a mail-in coupon will set you up with the complete version of *Twisted Metal: Black Online* (a 40-buck value, which pretty much covers the cost of the entire package). Some ISP (Internet Service Provider) starter software is also burned onto the disc, allowing the completely disconnected gamer to begin with ease.

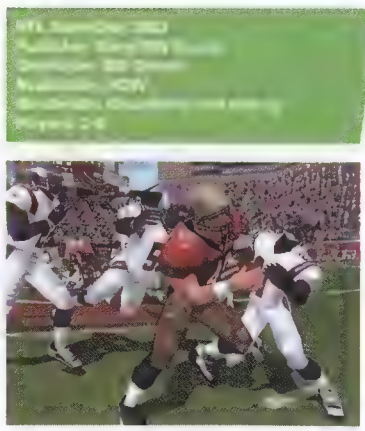
Necessities: To avoid all headaches, this is what you'll have to do before ripping into a round of *SOCOM* with your buddies on the East coast: 1) A PS2 memory card with at least 137KB of free space; 2) A standard phone line (to plug into a phone jack) or Ethernet cable (to run from your cable/DSL modem into your PS2); 3) And the aforementioned dial-up, cable or DSL service provider. That's it.

step 2/ software



The Hook: The flagship online title for Sony, *SOCOM* pits players in realistic tactical combat played with teamwork in mind. As it's not your typical run-and-shoot fragfest, precision is a must (including sniping enemies from afar and hunting as a pack). A communication headset is also included.

The Hook: Whether it's online or off-, the basis for any football game is the same: run better plays than your opponent, crushing them in the final tally. Though, with only a one-on-one challenge feature (vs. *GameDay*'s eight players), will *Madden*'s quality prevail over *GameDay*'s quantity?



The Hook: Although its reputation is lesser than *Madden*, *GameDay* has a few distinct features that the other online pigskin romps just don't offer: eight simultaneous players, access to games already in progress, and USB keyboard support (allowing easier chat).

The Hook: Like the original, *Offroad Fury 2* expands upon the dirt-track intensity of ATV racing. There are customizable drivers and five new mini-games; and with the added online capabilities, players can dip into competition with a handful of friends itching to spin some mud.

Auto Modelista
Publisher: Capcom
Developer: Capcom Japan
Availability: October
Bandwidth: Broadband and dial-up
Players: N/A

The Hook: Easily the most visually cool racer on store shelves this holiday—highlighted by its striking use of cel-shading—*Auto Modelista*'s online play will let players burn rubber with all facets of car aficionados. Plus, it will be the only revved-up online racer on the market for some time.

Tony Hawk Pro Skater 4
Publisher: Activison
Developer: Neversoft
Availability: Fall
Bandwidth: Broadband and dial-up
Players: N/A

The Hook: Although *Tony Hawk 2X* for Xbox had a limited online pulse, *Pro Skater 4* is the first in the franchise to truly exploit the community aspects of network gameplay. It may not be that complex—like doing inverts with buddies, competing for points—but that's what T-Hawk is all about.

Tribes: Aerial Assault
Publisher: Sierra
Developer: Inevitable Studios
Availability: September
Bandwidth: Broadband and dial-up
Players: 2-16

The Hook: *Aerial Assault* is the most PC-centric of the bunch, making it the most appropriate and probably the most accessible of the early online titles (aside from *SOCOM*). Like the PC versions, players exercise teamwork (and use vehicles) in this first-person actionier.

Twisted Metal: Black Online
Publisher: Sony
Developer: InCog, Inc.
Availability: NOW
Bandwidth: Broadband and dial-up
Players: 2-8 (broadband); 2 (narrowband)

The Hook: There are four modes of play for the destruction-holic: "Deathmatch," "Last Man Standing," "Man Hunt," and "Collector," making *Black Online* the most perfect online romp for the impulse gamer. Whether it's for five minutes of five hours, the rush is always accessible.

FIELDS OF GREEN...

yet another Xciting Xbox update

It's become a play ritual of sorts reporting the strides Microsoft continues to enjoy behind their Xbox brand, of which July saw many. With many Xbox patrons coming by way of the Dreamcast to enjoy the blue-blue skies of exclusive Sega wares like *Shenmue II, Panzer Dragoon Orta, ToeJam and Earl III, Gun Valkyrie, Sega GT, House of the Dead*, and *Jet Set Radio Future*, we get a lot of questions regarding the state of the console's progress, and Microsoft is always forthcoming with the results, so here's a slew of factoids as of August... In the three months following the price decline for all three next-gen systems, Xbox continues to have the largest gain on a percentage basis (Xbox +84%, PS2+75%, and GC+71%). After nine months in the market, Xbox has sold 11 million units of software in the United States, the most ever during the first nine months for a new console; the current Xbox attach rate of 4.3 is the highest of all next-gen systems at nine months in the market (PS2- 3.2, GC- 3.7); Xbox continued the strong momentum in July, taking 21% of next-gen console sales and outselling GameCube by 40% over the past three months. In July, Xbox sold 55% more software than GameCube; Xbox had two titles (*Halo* from Microsoft Game Studios and *NCAA Football 2003* from Electronic Arts) in the overall console Top 10 for July, while GameCube did not have any on the list. To date, third-party publishers have sold 47% more software on Xbox than they have for GameCube. *Halo* returned to be the number one Xbox title in July, attaching at 55% to new Xbox console sales. Xbox currently has more than 100 titles in the market and will have more than 200 titles by the end of the year. With *Mario Sunshine, Metroid Prime* and *Starfox Adventures* all falling within the next 90 days, each poised to sell in the millions, Nintendo will likely answer back big, but in the meantime, Team Green is definitely enjoying the ride so far.

freeze frame

In order to celebrate *Beach Spikers*, Sega recently sponsored the Venus Swim wear Competition where we definitely saw some things we'd like to spike.

Think these guys are single? You betcha! Caught in the act during the San Diego ComiCon they demonstrate why...

NEWSBYTES

Radiant Silvergun may have never reached the American Saturn, exhibiting the tragic end of Sega's horribly under-appreciated console, but that doesn't mean it wasn't one of the greatest shooters ever devised. Treasure eventually developed the arcade successor to the game, *Ikaruga*, and now it has been officially picked up by Infogrames for the GameCube. Set for a Dreamcast release in Japan on September 6, the game will hit the GC sometime next year, with a few added features.

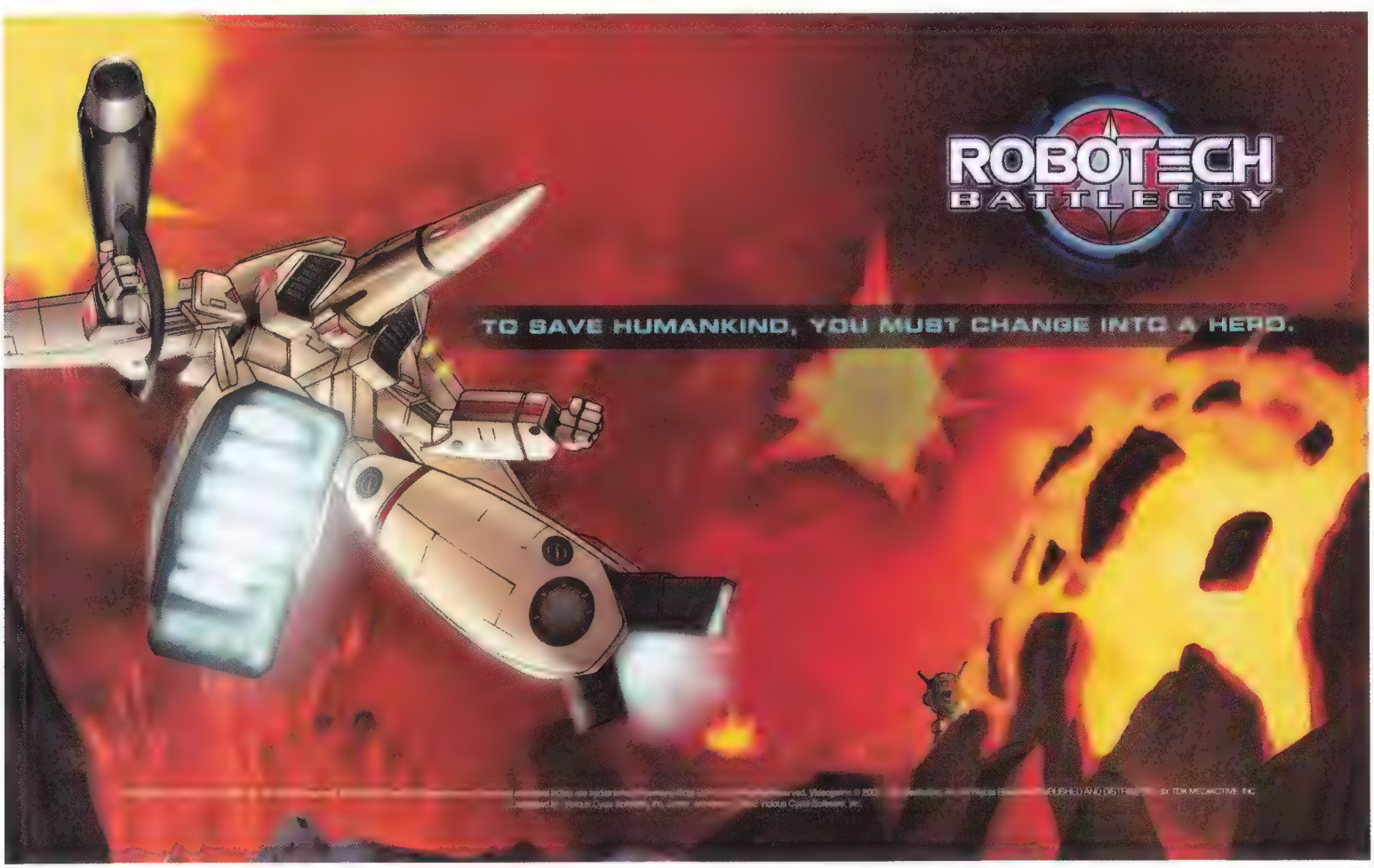
To hype the remarkable *Mario Sunshine*, Nintendo broke the world record of horrifically large pasta dishes, cooking up 3,265 pounds of spaghetti, surpassing the old Guinness achievement of 2,564. Fans got to jump into the three-foot high, ten-foot-wide pan to collect prizes.

Quake IV is coming, and it's being billed as a sequel to *Quake II*; single-player goodness is finally coming back. *Doom 3*, one of the most technologically advanced pieces of software every created, is also now, without doubt, coming to Xbox; John Carmac has said that a flawless transplant will be certain. Seeing is believing.

In an attempt to continue reducing the costs of its Xbox production, Microsoft is preparing another chip set from Focus Enhancements, Inc., which will convert hardware images efficiently to the screen. The motherboard is also getting revised, potentially saving the company several dollars per system. Next stop, more aggressive price drops? Doubtful in the near future.

Because some developers do care: *Final Fantasy XI 2002 Special Art Box* is coming for PlayStation 2. Essentially a Limited Edition, Yoshitaka Amano's artwork will be featured on the box and DVD label. Original illustrations and four embroidered, hand-crafted Vana'Diel Kingdom flags will also be included. Look for the gorgeous 8000-yen package on September 26.

Awesome news: *Final Fantasy III* development is underway for Game Boy Advance.
Silent Hill 3 is getting a new hero to torture, a women named Heather.



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> playback 10.2002

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LOBB-IEST.

After nabbing a couple issues off the newsstand (and being a huge fan of your previous endeavors), I've finally decided to subscribe to your wonderful publication so I can continue to gain access to exclusive interviews, articulate reviews/previews, and above all, the "real" inside views from the core of this complicated, albeit fun, industry. In addition, I love the excellent anime and cinema info which is another feature I simply would not be able to find in other gaming magazines. Ok, enough kissing-up and on to my question. I recently read in another mag (don't worry, I only buy it for the demos) that long-time Nintendo advocate Ken Lobb defected over to Microsoft as their Director of Content Planning for the XBOX, and considering your professional and friendly relationship with him during the 'ol days, I was wondering if you caught wind of any insider information regarding the resurrection of the infamous Lobb pistol and its use being implemented as an exclusive for the XBOX version of *Timesplitters 2*. A longshot I suppose, but not impossible by any means, considering The Lobb pistol was present in *Goldeneye* for the N64, which was developed by RAREWARE, and *Timesplitters 2* being handled by Free Radical, of who coincidentally, consists of key members from the *Goldeneye* team that created the game at RAREWARE at that time and the fact that Ken Lobb now works for M$. Regardless, any info on *Timesplitters 2* would be great. I'm looking forward to this FPS with great anticipation and believe it has what it takes to dethrone *HALO* as the king of FPS'...that is of course, until *HALO 2*. :o)
Yuichi

I'm sure Ken would be flattered that you remembered his little contribution to Bond; you caught this scary mug in the game too. I take it. We'll shoot him an email and see if he's cracked open the rum case. We're considering 10: Free Radical's first real outing on Xbox Boost seeing as how *Time Splitters* was rushed out the door so quickly. That's the point they set out to make, so expect no less. Of course, with the *Halo* and *Fable* bandwagons moving, they'll need to whip out their biggest guns or the Lobb pistol.

THERE CAN ONLY BE TWO.

If you want to experience anime, then you have to see only two anime series: *Cowboy Bebop* and *Neon Genesis* Evangelion. That's all I have to say. Also, is the movie *Cowboy Bebop: Knockin' On Heaven's Door* coming to theaters? If so, is it going to be released in select cities on limited screens.
Jason Cho

Dude, we hear you, but what is one to do after viewing it for the repeatedly? X, *ex Driver*, *Steel Angel Kurumi*, *Arjuna*, *Hellsing*, *Noir*, *Now and Then Here and There*... There's much new anime to love. After watching *The End of Evangelion* through, I must admit it's impossible to shake, a true masterpiece in any medium. Regarding the *BeBop Movie*, it's opening in select cities on limited screens. If you're in a major metropolitan area, Faye should be on her way to you very soon.

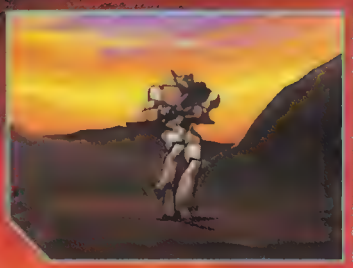
TECHNICALLY SPEAKING...

First I just want to say that your magazine is very well done—keep it hardcore. I love the production quality of your magazine. Where do you guys get such beautiful screenshots and CG models? Anyway, that's not the main reason I'm writing you. I wanted to know if you guys were planning on having more technical articles (mini or non) like you had in issue #8. In issue 8 you had a mini article which explained some technical aspects of *Toe Jam & Earl* from Visual concepts Graphics Engineer Robert Leyland. I found that bit of information fascinating and found myself wanting to know more. coughcoughi mageekcoughcough
Justin "NEO" Shockley

First, thanks, and we will. We're really happy with the feedback we've received on some of our more technical features. At first we weren't sure if readers would be interested, but it seems that as long as it's presented in the proper format that's long, candid and interesting, you guys really like it. We're currently planning an online series that presents the unique challenges in front of the developers, new ways that haven't yet been covered. It should begin next month, so look for it and let us know what you think.

CHANGE OR DIE.

ROBOTECH BATTLECRY



Xbox™ video game system screenshots shown.

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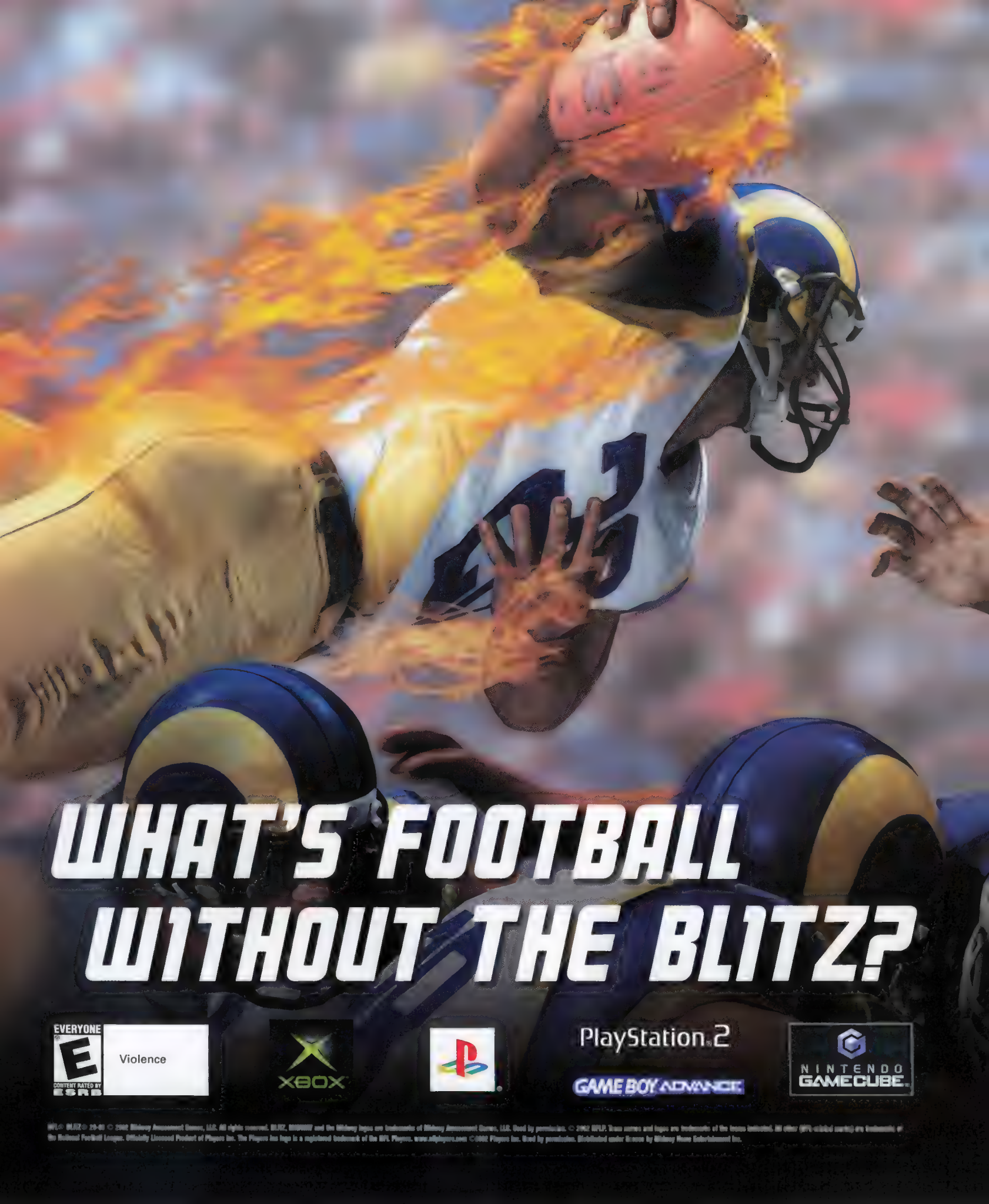
WHAT'S FOOTBALL
WITHOUT THE BLITZ?
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play games

Time flies when you're having fun...

blinx

The man behind *Sonic the Hedgehog* brings the magic to Microsoft.

words dave halverson

Like Sony, rather than adopt a single mascot character—a tradition not honored since the glory days of Sonic, Bonk, and Mario, when consoles came with free "pack-in" software—Microsoft will instead stand behind a diverse group of first-party kids and critters to represent their brand in the all-important action-platform category. Although the slot is currently vacant, Tork, Blinx, and *Psychonaut*'s Raz will soon reside exclusively on the Xbox, joining multi-console brethren Vexx, Malice, and Ty Tiger. The critter wars are heating up—games that I feel give gaming its glow. But what is it exactly that makes these games so special? A vastness and sense of wonder that renders them impossible to put down? Or the feeling they convey that sparks something deep inside, where that inner child is fighting to stay alive? The answer is, of course, all of the above, which is why *Blinx: The Time Sweeper* is such a special game.

Now that's what I call a cat in a space suit! Check the reflection in the goggles, and the fur... If you're allergic to kitty cats, beware.

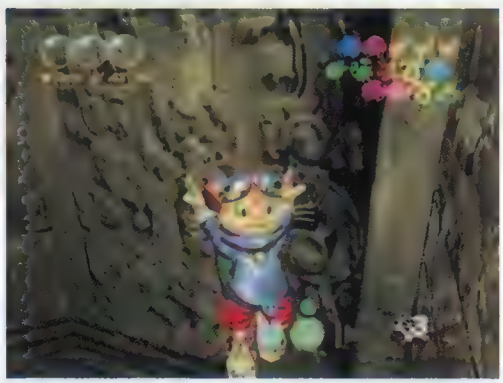
It's not every day a legendary game creator bestows upon us a game worthy of mascot status, in fact it's an increasingly rare occurrence, so Blinx is indeed a blessing. Blinx is the brain kitten of Naoto Ohshima, the man who created Sonic the Hedgehog back in 1991, and also worked on NiGHTS and Burning Rangers, during his tenure with Sonic Team, Sega's premier developer of all things action and adventure. Eleven years after creating the character that would propel Sega past Nintendo – an unfathomable achievement at the time – Ohshima has now set his sights, and trademark formula, on the realm of 3D on the world's most powerful console. The result, Blinx, is a gaming experience that will both brighten your day (and perhaps life) and tax your skills, as games of this nature are meant to do. For those of you who remember NiGHTS and Sonic CD (import Sonic CD that is), imagine that element of magic fused into modern game design, fluttering drums, techno samples, tinkling bells and all.

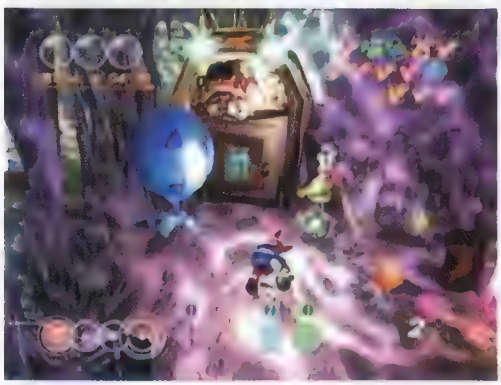
The hook in Blinx is the ability to manipulate time, and the way it's woven into the fabric of the game. Blinx possesses the ability to record, playback, pause, rewind, and fast forward time, but not when or wherever he desires.

"Blinx possesses the ability to record, playback, pause, rewind, and fast forward time."

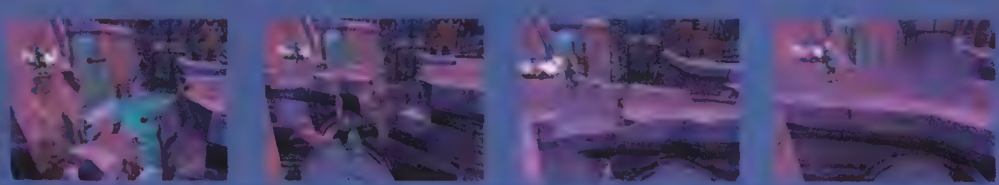
Each function must be earned by accumulating matching time crystals, at least three of a kind—some of which are sprinkled strategically around the levels, with others spewing from fallen enemies. Different colored combinations render different abilities. *Blinx*'s method of collection and disposal comes by sucking up anything not fixed in the environment by way of the Time Sweeper (a device resembling a leaf blower, of which there are many models, each with abilities akin to certain environments and enemies in the game), and then firing them back out at monsters. Huge gears, massive chunks of earth, refrigerators—the Time Sweeper gulps down garbage like Anna Nicole at a Twinkie factory. Levels are cleared by disposing all of the monsters, and the way they are placed within each environment has a direct correlation with the number of crystals and ammunition in the immediate vicinity. Additionally, the Time Sweeper can only hold five items in its chamber, and it often takes a couple of shots to dispose of a common enemy, so the game quickly becomes as much about strategic monster disposal as it does negotiating the time-sensitive terrain, creating a unique, intoxicating balance as the levels become more vast, populated, and layered. Some of the weirder, floating squid-like balloon creatures actually dispense rubbish, so if you're low on ammo, you can always hang around and wait for them to

Below are some examples of the textures you can look forward to in *Blinx*—amazing.





"The way in which time manipulation is integrated into the environments is pure genius."



Has anyone seen the bridge? Where's that confounded bridge? Ah-ha!

attack. This chews up time, however, and in this game, time is a most valuable commodity.

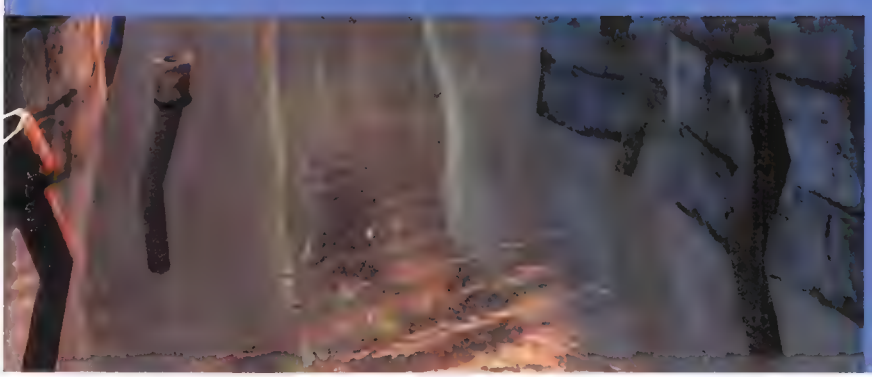
The way in which time manipulation is integrated into the environments is pure genius. Recording your movement—jumping on a seesaw, for instance—will vault you during playback; fallen bridges and pillars can be rewound to cross chasms or reach objects; and pausing has all manner of implications. The time control element isn't merely a commercial for the Xbox's technological supremacy, it's the catalyst on which the entire game resides, and it's one of the best new play mechanics since the spin-dash or using water for propulsion. Just when you think all of the good ideas have been taken, someone like Ohshima, or Miyamoto, always pulls another rabbit out of their hat.

Speaking from a purely graphical standpoint, *Blinx* is further testament to the Xbox's almost insane ability to manipulate large, complex environments filled with detailed characters, lighting effects, animated and complex textures—the works. Blinx himself is a marvel, coated with realistic fur, shiny reflective boots and seamless attire, and the bosses...forget about it: Ohshima's bulbous Burton-like blobs of fury are just too cool for any of us.

The game's strongest quality, though, is the sensation you get playing it: Blinx's funny scamper, crazy grin, Japanese flare, and contagious intensity give him an uncanny sense of personality. He's the unlikeliest of heroes who's impossible not to fall in love with, and the areas that surround him are literally bursting with possibility, alive with vivid, warped exaggeration and expression.

Like human catnip, Blinx is the latest in a string of stellar Xbox titles, from *Halo* to games like *Jet Set Radio Future*, *Gun Valkyrie*, *Buffy: The Vampire Slayer*, *Enclave*, *DoA3*, *OddWorld: Munch's Oddysey* and *Gotham Racing*. Post *Blinx*, the games I mentioned at the outset will further attest that, like the Dreamcast, which had the arsenal but lacked the guns to fire it, the Xbox is carving out a respectable niche aimed squarely at the enthusiast gamer—aside from their obvious mainstream applications—and they've got both barrels loaded. Games like *Blinx* show that the company is developing a similar grasp of the market as Sony did when they began their campaign with the PlayStation—good news for Dreamcast-come-Xbox owners. For now, I'm dedicated to cleaning out every nook and cranny of *Blinx*, before I begin campaigning for the sequel. I'm all for Blinx as a mascot, then *Blinx 2* can be the pack-in game for the next 'box!

"The areas that surround Blinx are bursting with possibility and alive with vivid expression."



Read our interview with the creator of *Blinx*, Naoto Ohshima, on the following page:

interview

Blinx creator Naoto Ohshima on his cool new cat

"If you're asking me if I want to make Blinx into what Mario is for Nintendo, the answer would be yes."

How long has *Blinx* been in development, and was it planned as an Xbox exclusive from day one?

Artoon and Microsoft first started talking about creating an amazing platformer in December 2000. From the very beginning, the concept was to create an Xbox-exclusive game. We worked intimately together on the character design and the game design. We locked down the character design and concept in June 2001.

How many people are on the *Blinx* team? Is the team separate or are some of them also working on your other project, *Ghost Vibration*?

There are approximately 30 people on the *Blinx* team, not including members who work on movies and sound. Depending on what each individual's role is in the game creation, busy periods are quite different, so some artists do work on multiple projects.

You have a trademark style of action-game design, in that you like to give the player a time limit to discover a series of maneuvers to achieve their goal in each area, setting up complex scenarios that gradually immerse the player into the action more and more as they progress. Can you give us a little insight about this particular style?

Since controlling time is a huge element in the game, imposing a time limit was indispensable as slow-paced gameplay would not match the game's objectives. Another big reason for a time limit is that this game actually records the gameplay into the hard-drive. Because of that, we had to have a time limit.
Of course, apart from those reasons, we really pursued the pure fun of action games, beyond great graphics and effects... As a result, we have our current game.

Tell us about the concept of manipulating time. How did this idea come to you? Do you expect the copycats to come pouring out of the woodwork? Would you consider it flattering or would you rather they back-off and come up with their own ideas.

Blinx is a game where you can control time using REWIND or PAUSE, as you would when operating a VCR, in real-time, and freely move around in the world. This has enabled us to provide an experience like no other action game before. To talk about copycats, if they were exactly the same, that would be very sad. However, if someone was inspired by *Blinx*, and created something new out of it, that would be great. For the whole industry to advance, games always need to keep evolving.

There is obviously much hidden throughout *Blinx* to get players to revisit areas repeatedly. Any big pay-offs for finding everything?

There are plenty of hidden elements. We all hope everyone enjoys them.

What are you most proud of regarding *Blinx*'s development?

That would be the *Blinx* team. I was able to create a great development atmosphere with this game. I believe I owe a lot to the talented people on the development team, and also Microsoft for providing this new environment. We were able to achieve this great game based on the collaboration of many, many people.

Can you tell us what drove you to cats as the keepers of time? What about Blinx, did he take a long time to create?

"Time" is something very close to us, and [in the same instance], something very mysterious and wondrous. When you look at cats, they suddenly appear from nowhere, walk on fences, and then disappear, as they are traveling through time. Cats were treated as gods in ancient Egypt, and they were also written as fairies in Norwegian myths. This image that cats have matches the game very much.

Tell us about your first experience with the Xbox—did you find it everything you'd hoped for in terms of development?

We were all convinced that this is an amazing machine! There is no more that I can say. The development speed is very fast with this machine.

Since the Xbox is enjoying record sales outside of Japan, did you create *Blinx* to attract more Japanese consumers or are you looking more towards Europe and America?

We created this game for everyone around the world. My wish is for everyone in the world to love this game.

So, is this your *Sonic* for Microsoft? Will we see more *Blinx* adventures?

If you're asking me if I want to make *Blinx* into what *Mario* is for Nintendo platforms, the answer would be yes. I hope that Blinx becomes a character, which represents Microsoft. Blinx's adventures have just begun. For it to become what we wish it to be, we need all the support we can get. Thank you. **play**

previews

030 malice
032 star wars: the clone wars
034 sub rebellion
036 bloodrayne
037 dragon's lair 3D
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040 splinter cell
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046 disneys pk: out of the shadows
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050 blade II
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054 crank the weasel
055 gta vice city
056 tenchu 3
058 godzilla: damm
059 suikoden III
060 preview gallery

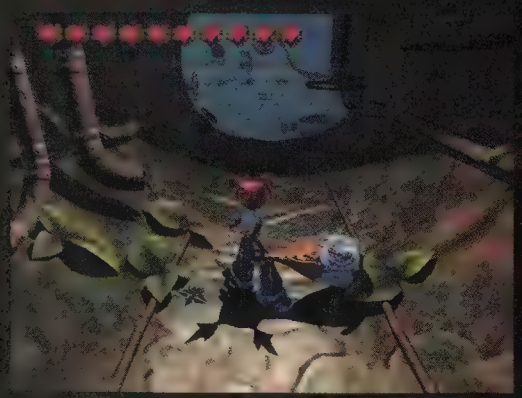
GIRLIE SHOW

Now that I've had her, I can honestly say Malice is one of a kind...

words dave halverson

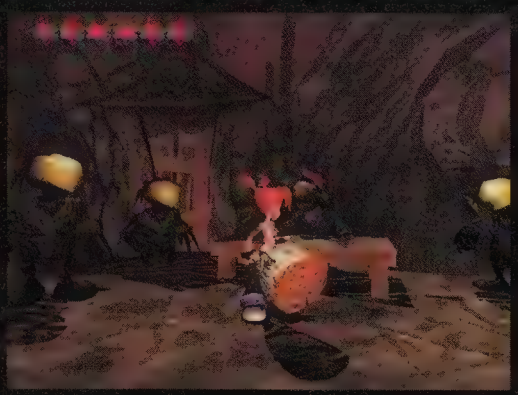
Moments before going to press, a preview disc of *Malice* showed up on our doorstep, so we did what any responsible magazine would, and stalled. After an hour or so of hands-on, I quickly arrived at the conclusion that the wormhole is even deeper than I imagined. *Malice* is as twisted a fable as they come, brought to life through death in a most absurd way. While I'm not quite sure exactly what *Malice* is just yet, a frolicky platformer it is not. *Malice* is, however, as expected, gorgeous. Aside from what we already knew about the Crow militia, mutant creatures, and a smallish teen with a manga head and a massive hammer, the Malice gameplay aesthetic seems to encompass a lot of puzzle solving, but not in the usual dry, matter-of-fact tradition. The game hinges on an elaborate, nightmarish network of mechanisms that work in strange sequence—as I imagine *Evil Twin* would have achieved, had it been adequately tweaked.

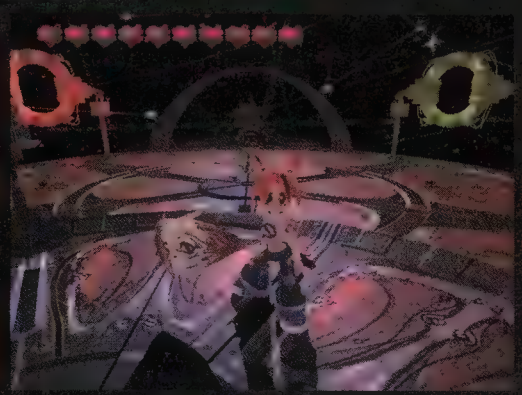
Gwen Stefani's vocalization of the reluctant heroine seems a little subdued, but I chalk that up to the unfinished nature of the complete audio package. If nothing else, her carefree coolness seems to be intact. *Malice*'s only Achilles' heel steps in it just where I feared it might, with a less- than-acceptable framerate, although it's expected at this juncture in the development. Given that Argonaut is at the helm, I'm confident the final product will never dip below 30-fps on Xbox, which, given the bump mapping and detail on display, would be pretty amazing. As one of this year's most highly anticipated action-adventure games nears completion, it's all up to the team now to sew-up *Malice* nice and tight. **play**



Can I say enough about bump mapping. No, I can't.

"While I'm not quite sure exactly what *Malice* is just yet, a frolicky platformer it is not. It is, however, gorgeous."





HE WAS UNDEFEATED.

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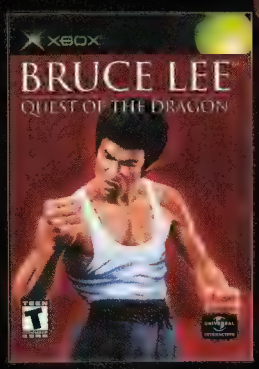
BRUCE LEE™

QUEST OF THE DRAGON



For the first time ever, you can fight as the one and only Bruce Lee. In Quest of the Dragon, motion capture technology authentically recreates more than one hundred of Bruce's Jeet Kune Do moves. Designed exclusively for Xbox, it's an action-packed fighting game where you'll battle hordes of thugs in an epic struggle for survival. Get ready for a fight of legendary proportion.

T TEEN
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Suggestive Themes
Violence

XBOX

UNIVERSAL INTERACTIVE

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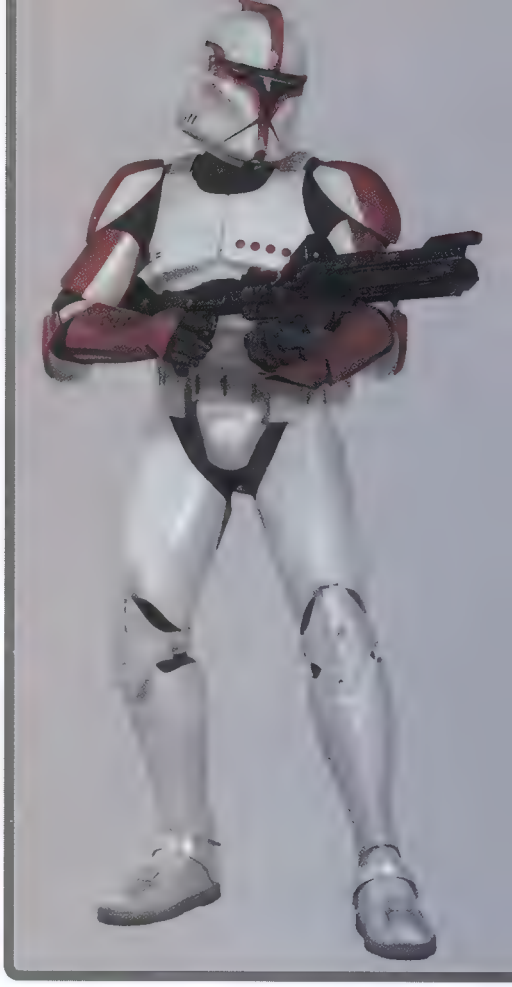
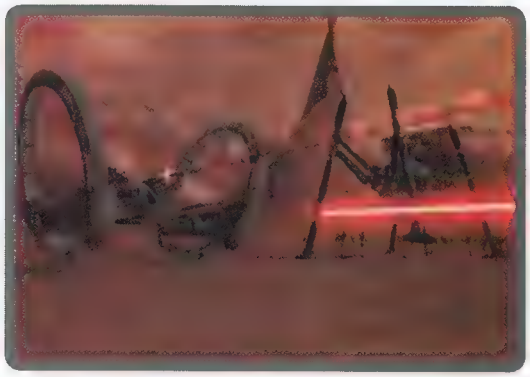
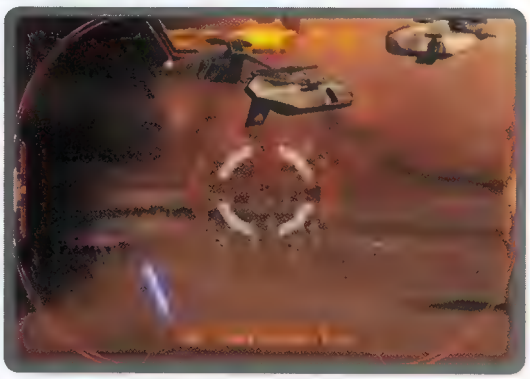
SEND IN THE CLONE!

Will a better movie lead to better games? If *Attack of the Clones* is any indication, then yes.

words michael hobbs







Looks like the movie. That's a good start.

"The graphics are very nicely done, especially the environmental effects and texture work."

What a relief it was to walk out of the theatre totally pleased with *Attack of the Clones*. Indeed, I could now pretend that *Episode 1* never happened, and that this was the true beginning of the *Star Wars* saga. So, would the spate of new *Star Wars* games reflect this newfound energy? Remember, not even the talented Factor 5 could do much wit their *Episode 1* game, *Battle for Naboo*.

And things are indeed looking up with this GameCube offering direct from LucasArts, *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*. The game opens with a bang as you are thrown right into the climactic duel on Geonisis. At this stage, you're playing as Mace Windu (Samuel "This party's over" Jackson) and all you've got is your lightsabre as you slice through battle droids like butter on your way to a waiting dropship. Once there, you take to the skies for some flight-shooting action, then trade off to a battle tank for a little gun-turret defense. This one level is like the entire game in fast forward, as you get to sample little bits of everything all in one go.

Even though this is but a preview version of four levels, most elements are in place that point toward this being a worthwhile game. For starters, the control and gameplay are both solid, with good action and enemy balance. And the graphics are very nicely done, especially the environmental effects like the persistent dust storm on Geonosis and the high quality of the texture work and detail on the vehicles. The game should be out in time for the DVD release of *Episode II* in November. **play**

star wars: the clone wars — preview

GC — developer: lucasarts / publisher: lucasarts / available: fall

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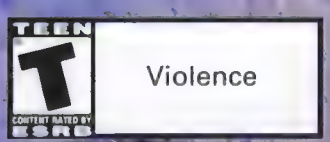
The waits over. The series that's left the deepest mark on the fighting genre is back for another round. Happy pummeling.

PlayStation.2



TEKKEN 4

SUBCULTURE

When's the last time you played a good underwater shooter?

It surprised me how stunned I've been at a great 3D shooter. I hadn't really realized until I popped in this preview version of Sub Rebellion from developers Nemesis Studios and known for their awesome R-Type series. Here is a great 3D shooter.

Gamers with a bit of history under their belt might remember a 3D shooter from Irem called *In The Hunt*. Think of this as a 3D version of that game. It has the same great underwater feel, with a definite weight in the movement of your sub. Normally, "sluggish" control would be the death knell of an 3D action game, but here, that sensation works to great effect as you swim the sub around to target a load of enemies. Another typical no-no, the use of fogging, is also appropriately applied, giving the depths a mysterious darkness.

But the coolest feature of the game thus far has to be the sonar ping. Enemies hidden in the murk suddenly *blip* in wire frame mode as you send out a sonic wave. The pinging is also used to find hidden treasure scattered throughout the level. Set this aloft, and you can upgrade your weapons, shields, etc.

There's hope for the traditional shooter yet. **pkay**

"The coolest feature of the game thus far has to be the sonar ping."

Sonar ping! Target your enemies above and below the seas.

sub rebellion — preview

PS2 — developer: Irem / publisher: Metro 3D / available: fall

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PlayStation.2 NINTENDO GAMECUBE XBOX

EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB — Comic Mischief, Violence

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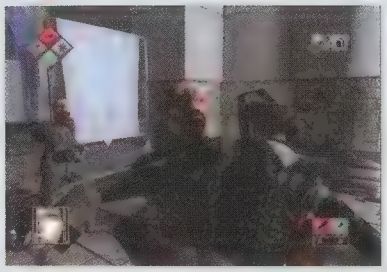


That's it! I'm becoming a Nazi that wears a really thick turtleneck.

FEEDING FRENZY

The sexy Bloodrayne wraps her long luscious legs around her prey or puts them up in the air, and drinks their blood. God bless America. [illegible]

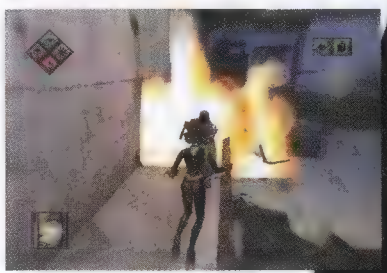
After a year of staring at her private parts, and even giving the real thing a squeeze at E3, Majesco's new half-breed (but she's all woman), Bloodrayne, has finally decided to drop by the office for a little bit of the old "hands-on."

It's no secret that *Bloodrayne* is Majesco's first stab at establishing a brand on which to pin their hopes of becoming a force to be reckoned with. As far as characters go, you couldn't ask for much more than a shapely, sultry bloodsucker with a taste for Nazis, but her cleavage and curves will only get her so far. In a market saturated with games that make us drool, and environments on display that truly astound, the real test will be in the gameplay and technology, and at this point, Terminal Reality is winning only half the battle—gameplay.

Although her run animation feels disconnected and floaty, the Bloodrayne model is a thing of beauty, with flowing hair, realistic leather accoutrements, and fluid animation. The brunt of the gameplay involves a Sub-Zero-style chain-grab-and-pull move followed by neck-snacking; a leap of love followed by the same; and the ability to use an assortment of pistols and rifles. Bloodrayne can also slow down time, *Matrix* style, and literally dodge bullets, and even spin and point prey she's feeding on towards any bullets with her name on them. So, the gameplay is definitely headed in the right direction.

The problem, at this point, is in the execution and the technology. The first environment you see, a bland swamp where Bloodrayne trains, is barely up to first-generation PS2 standards; in fact, it's not, and is laden with collision mishaps. Her jump is also suspect, as the ground often feels like it's on springs. Once you graduate to the confines of the drab yet nicely built Nazi facility, things get infinitely better, but Bloodrayne seeps through doors, and hand-to-hand combat and platform gameplay still feel disconnected. The models themselves look excellent, down to their grimaces of pain as they are drained and/or dismembered, but in this market, the surroundings will need to improve greatly as will the game's feel, which is in dire need of fine-tuning. I still have very high hopes that Terminal Reality can pull it all together and deliver a game worthy of this character. If it were up to me, I'd take another six months to up the technology, but with an October release fast approaching, I guess they'll just have to burn a whole lot of midnight oil. **play**

"As far as characters go, you couldn't ask for much than a shapely bloodsucker with a taste for Nazis."



bloodrayne

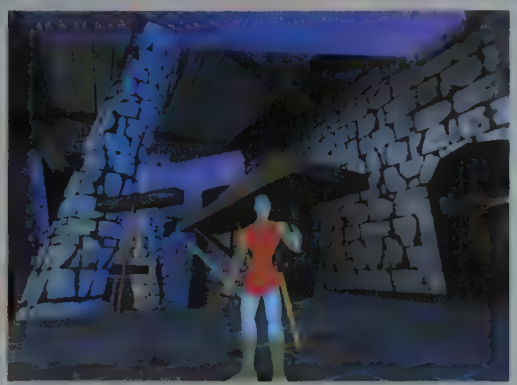
PS2 GC XB

developer: terminal reality / publisher: majesco / available: october

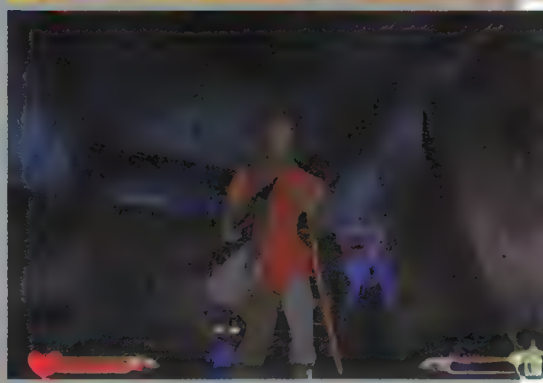
The technology is wavering while the game promises not to suck. Will Terminal Reality be able to pull it all together? Let us pray.

WHAT A DIRK

Can Dragonstone paint *Dragon's Lair* onto a 3D canvas and preserve the magic?



"The new *Dragon's Lair* will have to rely on elements that made the original so intoxicating."



Dirk shows off some of his new moves.

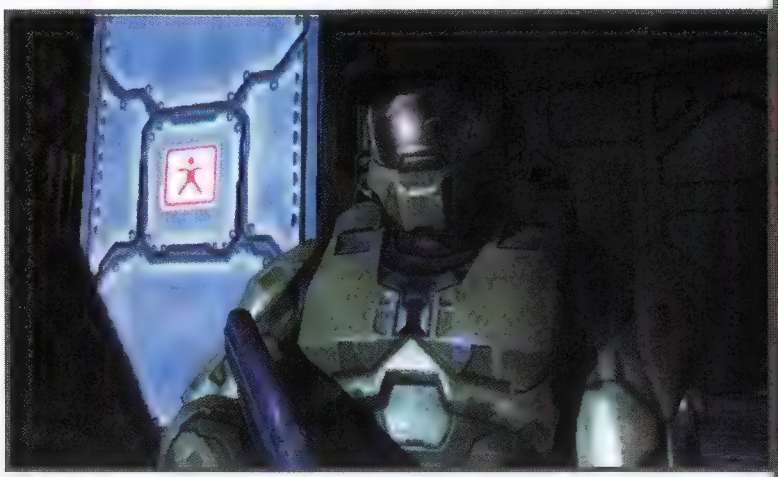
Not long ago, we hosted team [illegible] *Dragon's Lair* and thought how amazing it would be to see another something so beautiful in real time. That was a long while ago and compared to games like *Dark Messiah of Might and Magic* and *Darkest of Darkness*, this 3D take on the classic looks positively retro. Set entirely in polygonal environments, with gorgeous [illegible] using the voice talent of Dragon's Lair, how to rely entirely on the elements that made the original so intoxicating. Don't get me wrong, the [illegible] animation will likely be the best ever in a [illegible] game, but it didn't do much for the original [illegible] Dirk's animated form. Other than a few [illegible] glitches, it looks pretty good to the pre-beta build. When all the [illegible] *Dragon's Lair 3D* is shaping up [illegible] to be an [illegible].

Through a series of [illegible] sequences replete with [illegible] and [illegible] [illegible] automatic, the game would [illegible] [illegible] of the [illegible] [illegible] with [illegible] [illegible] and [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]

HALO AGAIN

One of the best console first-person shooters out there shows evidence of sequel superiority.

words brady fiechter



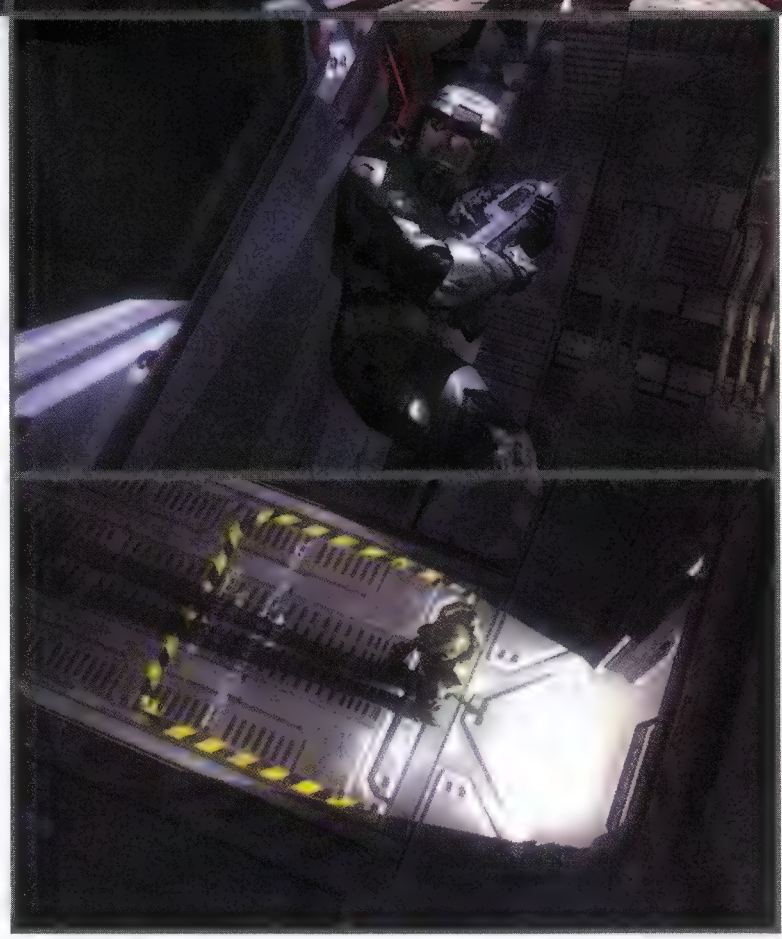
No more mystery: *Halo 2* is on the way and, as Bungie Studios head Jason Jones put it, "... a lot like *Halo*, only it's *Halo* on fire, going 130 miles per hour through a hospital zone, being chased by helicopters and ninjas, and the ninjas are all on fire, too."

So the bottom line is, it's *Halo*, only bigger, badder, louder, faster, scarier, meaner? Cool.

And Bungie boasts that the game will undoubtedly thrill with a new, highly improved engine. "Our code squeezes every drop of power out of the Xbox," said Chris Butcher, one of the engineering leads on the game. "We're doing dynamic lighting and shadows, per-pixel everything, rendering gigantic, lush environments. The graphical features we're using are so advanced we don't even have buzzwords for them yet."

What hasn't changed about this massively anticipated sequel is the face of the enemy; the Covenant still wants to rule the planet, and you are still the genetically engineered super-soldier Chief Master, who fires big guns and drives armored vehicles to end the alien terror. In *Halo 2*, there are even more big guns and armored vehicles to enjoy, and a wider variety of aliens to pop—essentially more of everything that made the first game one of last year's best, an Xbox showcase and universally respected powerhouse that even appealed to the FPS neophytes. The long wait continues. **play**

"The graphical features we're using are so advanced, we don't even have buzzwords for them yet." *Chris Butcher, software engineer*



Lighting and texturing are already showing signs of improvement.

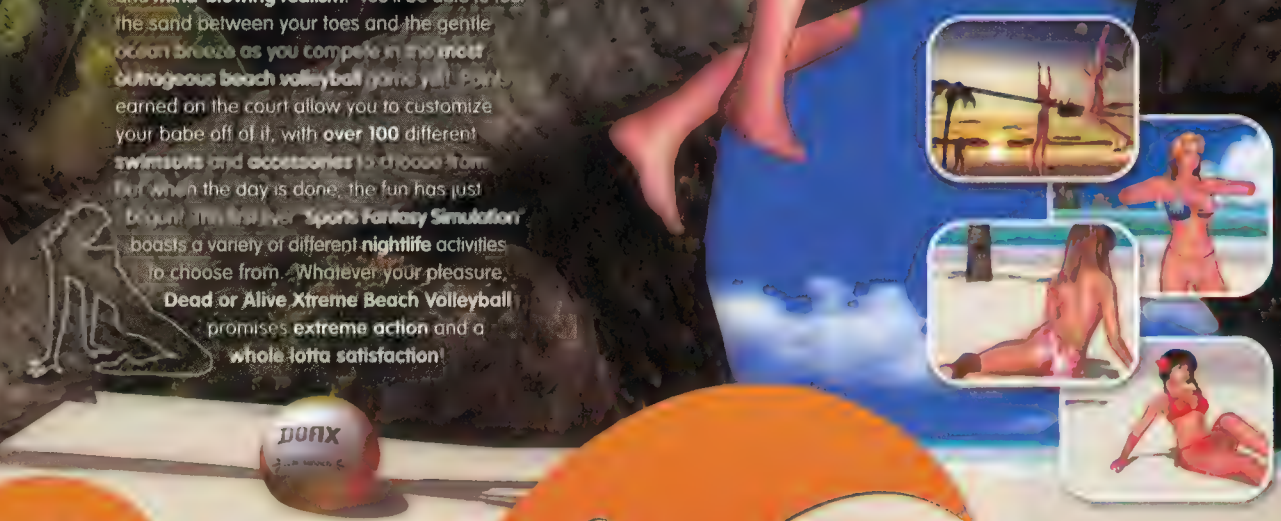
halo 2 preview

XB developer: **bungie** / publisher: **microsoft** / available: **late 2003**

You know what to expect: *Halo* taken up a giant notch. That Bungie is crafting the game from the ground up shows its dedication to the best sequel possible.

Chicks really dig the trees...

and you'll love the scenery too because the babes from the million-selling fighting game, **Dead or Alive®3** are back! This time, they're setting aside their fighting gear for some **fun-in-the-sun** swimwear and turning up the heat in **Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball™**. This is no ordinary volleyball game - this is volleyball to the extreme with **great gameplay** and **mind-blowing realism**. You'll be able to feel the sand between your toes and the gentle ocean breeze as you compete in the **most outrageous beach volleyball** game yet! Points earned on the court allow you to customize your babe off of it, with **over 100** different **swimsuits** and **accessories** to choose from. But when the day is done, the fun has just begun! The first ever **Sports Fantasy Simulation** boasts a variety of different **nightlife** activities to choose from. Whatever your pleasure, **Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball** promises **extreme action** and a **whole lotta satisfaction!**



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SNAKE EATER

Steeped in Tom Clancy's universe, *Splinter Cell* has enough cool stuff going for it to make you forget there was ever a game called *Metal Gear Solid*

words tom ham

Amidst all the hype and hoopla surrounding *Doom III* at this year's E3, one title that managed to steal some of the limelight was Tom Clancy's *Splinter Cell*, a third-person stealth action game unlike any other I've seen before. Showcasing fantastic visuals and truly innovative gameplay, it will definitely deliver action fans their fix when it hits store shelves later this fall. But I couldn't wait, so I managed to get my hands on an exclusive demo of *Splinter Cell* and, suffice it to say, I was blown away. This game is going to rock.

Players take on the role of Sam Fisher, a member of the Third Echelon, where operatives are taught to infiltrate, neutralize and disappear. Created by the National Security Agency (NSA), the Third Echelon is a different breed of military covert operation. Unlike *Rainbow Six* where you're a member of an elite group of soldiers, the operatives in the Third Echelon work *alone*.

"I came up with the idea for the NSA sub-agency Third Echelon before putting together the plot," explains JT Petty, scriptwriter for *Splinter Cell*. "It was around February or March of 2001. The game designers knew they wanted to make a lone operative stealth/action game, and we needed a framework to hang that on that would stand up to a Clancy level of realism. Third Echelon came about after reading Clancy's *The Bear and the Dragon*. That novel is largely about the futility of facing America on a battlefield; if you want to go tank-for-tank and missile-for-missile, the U.S. will have anybody outgunned. So I tried to imagine how a smaller power could hope to face the U.S. in armed combat. The best solution I could imagine was terrorism in the guise of information warfare. Then I tried to imagine an agency put in place specifically to face that threat, which became Third Echelon. I chose the NSA as the agency behind Third Echelon because I wanted to make a story about the power of information in modern warfare. A lot of the political and bureaucratic details came from James Bamford's book *Body of Secrets*. The details of Fisher's gadgets and weaponry came from extensive research with the game designers into next-generation weaponry." So when two CIA agents mysteriously disappear in Azerbaijan, Fisher is sent in to investigate and prevent a terrorist attack.

Although the storyline is certainly timely, it's not what makes *Splinter Cell* so compelling to play. Now with the gameplay elements of *Metal Gear Solid 2* in mind, take it to the next level. "Since the game centers mainly on stealth," explains Roxane Gosselin, associate producer, "we had to give Sam more moves then your basic sneaking around variety. Sam will also be able to alter the environment to help him on his missions. For example, he can shoot out a light to create a dark space where he can hide. Every aspect of the gameplay was centered around stealth." In the demo, Sam Fisher was able to sneak, roll, repel, scale fences (as well as climb over them), hang from ledges, shimmy, peek around corners and even slide down a zip wire. And it's the little details that make all the difference in *Splinter Cell* (i.e. if you step on broken glass or make a wooden floor creak because you're walking too fast—all of this can make someone take notice of you). The game will have the typical stealth elements (avoiding security cameras, sneaking around guards, etc.), but after playing it first hand, there is so much more.

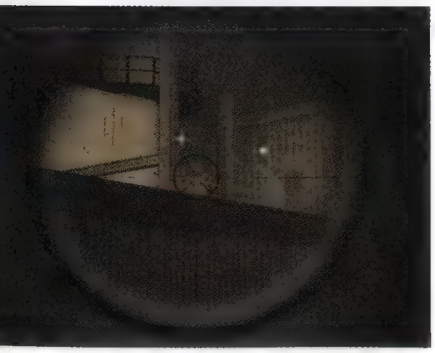
What sets it apart from similar genre titles are the unique weapons and the cool gadgets at Fisher's disposal; right now, he's set to have 13 different forms of artillery. "That number could change," continues Gosselin. "We are thinking of other weapons to add, but nothing has been firmed up yet." Fisher's main hand-cannon is a FN2000 multi-purpose assault rifle, a cool weapon that allows players to change the rate of fire from a single shot to fully automatic. He can also carry a sidearm.

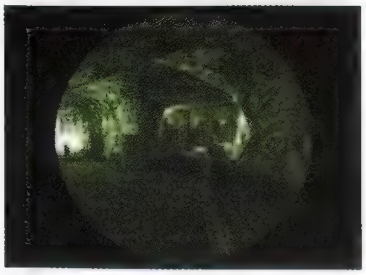
In addition to weapons, players can pick up first-aid kits, grenades and, of course, gadgets. Yet what's truly unique about *these* gadgets is that they're not used for taking out an enemy, but helping keep Fisher out of sight (like night and thermal goggles or an optic cable that you can slide underneath a door to see who or what is on the other side). My favorite is the sticky camera—a remote optical device that you can attach anywhere and check out what's ahead of you. And to top it off, you can even activate night and thermal vision with the camera. Pretty slick.

Visually, the game is spectacular, too—and that's no exaggeration. The textures are incredibly detailed—probably some of the best I've seen on Xbox; and by far the coolest aspect of the visuals are the lighting effects. "Without question, we are most proud of the light system and the gameplay that centers on that," explains Gosselin. "It really makes the game feel like you're in a movie." Other great effects such as real-time shadows, lens flares, and ricocheting bullets make for an incredibly realistic experience.

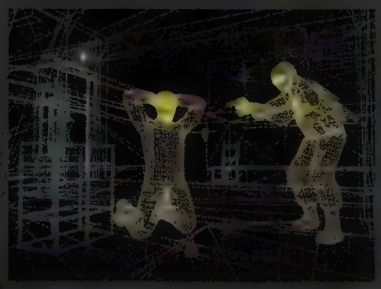
Splinter Cell will have 11 different missions spanning 25 levels. "I'm hoping the game will give players about 25-30 hours of gameplay," says Gosselin. "Each player will experience the game differently, but I know you'll love every minute of it." **play**

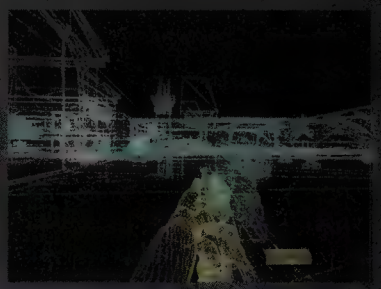
"Action fans will definitely get their fix when this impressive game hits store shelves later this fall."

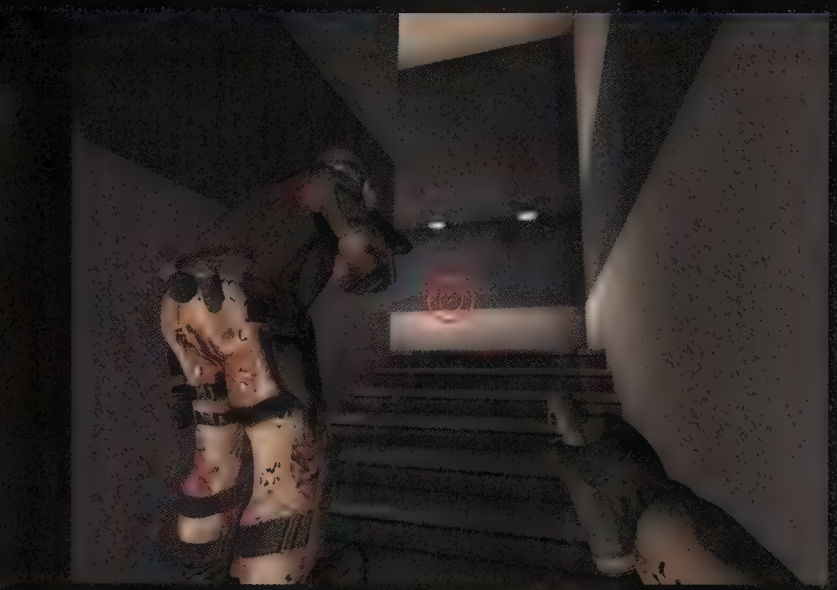




With over 50 people working on *Splinter Cell*, it's no wonder why the game looks and plays so good.







"Visually, the game is spectacular. The textures are incredibly detailed, but the coolest aspect of the visuals are the lighting effects."

Shhh... be very, very quiet, we're stealing terrorists.

tom clancy's splinter cell

preview

XB

For the coolest gadgets and graphics in '02, tap into this stealth tale on Planet Clancy.

developer: ubi soft / publisher: ubi soft / release: november

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XBOX

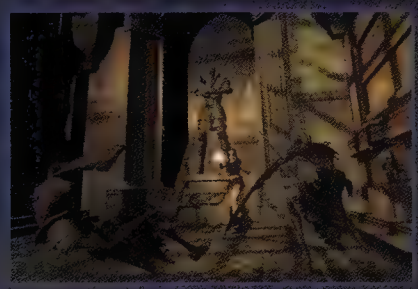
DANGER GIRL

Lara's getting ready to sneak back into our lives.

words dave halverson

Lara Croft: overendowed, and overexposed... or is she? She's the poster girl for game babes for sure, but the more I think about it, the more I'm convinced that *Angel of Darkness* will be her total rebirth. Lara, as a character, was really an idea before her time. A small core of fearless Englishmen, famous for designing a beer-bellied caveman and ace mad-cap side scrollers, decided to ditch their Indy Jones clone for a buxom babe with cones on her chest, and as fate would have it, the world bit. Beyond the boobs, however, the real reason *Tomb Raider* took off was because it was a great game. Core found a way to combine storytelling, a *Prince of Persia*-like platforming aesthetic, graceful acrobatics, and a double-barreled assault, to one wholly engulfing set of temples and ruins. Since that beautiful first outing, Lara has had her sequels, but until now, she's never really hit her full potential, as the true queen of videogames.

Lara's breasts are finally round, they may even move for the first time in seven years, and she's even on the run, pursued by the police, headlong into a dark, unholy world. Much has been said about this latest *Tomb Raider*, so until we actually play it, there is little else to say, except that we can't wait for the chance. Here's looking at you, Miss Croft. **play**



Looks like the beginning of a great porn film. Not that I've ever seen one.

"Beyond the boobs, the real reason Tomb Raider took off was because it was a great game"

lara croft tomb raider: angel of darkness — preview

PS2

We promise not to write another word about *The Angel of Darkness* until we play it.

[redacted] core design / publisher eidos / release november

Computer Games Magazine (Editors' Choice)

Computer Gaming World (Editors' Choice)

PC Gamer (Editors Choice)

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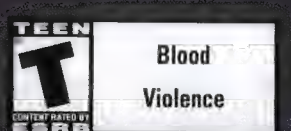

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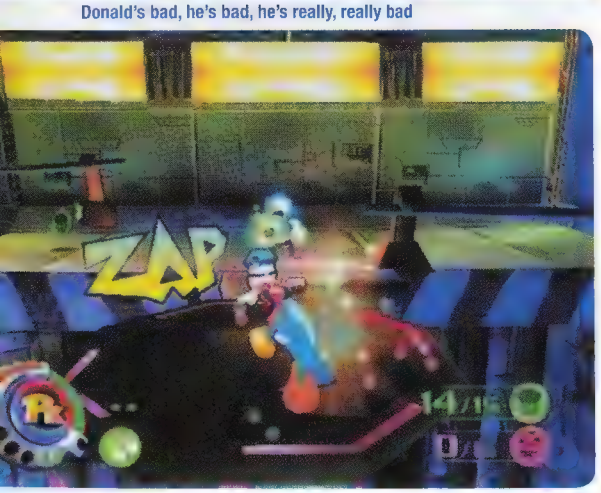
QUACK TO THE FUTURE

Donald Duck gets the comic-book overhaul from '68 he so desperately needs to stay out of the frying pan.

words dave halverson

Donald's bad, he's bad, he's really, really bad



Donald Duck may be passé, kiddish, and head run well into the red zone on the boredom scale, but his alter ego, PK, a much cooler, smoother chick, is ready for prime time. PK, which stands for the scientific Latin term "Platyrhynchos Kinetikous," or "Duck of Energy," is Ubi Soft's latest in-house platforming creation—a game that will begin to wash away the painful reality that our beloved Ubi Soft, once one of the classiest acts in all of gaming, has gotten so obese that it must now distribute the likes of *Myst*, *Rocky*, and *Deathtrap*. Yes, the house that Rayman built has become a breeding ground for lowly licenses and gratuitous drivel, but we still have Michael Ancel and games like his *Project BG & E*, *Rayman*, and now Disney's *PK: Out of the Shadows*, to remind us that the fat lady may never have to sing. Designed and developed by Ubi Soft Milan (Mula-Italia), they've taken the Italian comic book character, introduced in Europe in 1988, and constructed around it a *Rayman*-esque actioner that's got it all. In the vein of all the best platformers, PK's got all the requisite stuff down pat, like perfect strafing, a finely tuned camera, a healthy dose of stealth, timing maneuvers, floating platforms, lock-on shooting, charge weapons, boost jumps, etc., etc. The deeper you burrow, the more moves and new dynamics you uncover, until you're fully immersed in platforming paradise. The look, much like *Sly Cooper*, is achieved by adding detailed textures, thick outlines, bright, vivid effects, and diffused lighting to cel-shaded polys, creating a decidedly saturated yet simplistic look—great stuff.

The story has PK, aided by his main ally, UNI, a super computer holographic head in a box, launching a counterstrike against an alien horde, the Enemians, to stop them from enslaving Earth and turning humans into slaves. So it ain't "War and Peace", it is shaping up to be a great game. **play**

"In the vein of all the best platformers, PK's got all the requisite stuff down pat..."

disney's pk: out of the shadows — preview

PS2 GC

Gives the phrase "I'll have the duck" a whole new meaning

developer: ubi soft milan / publisher: ubi soft / available: november

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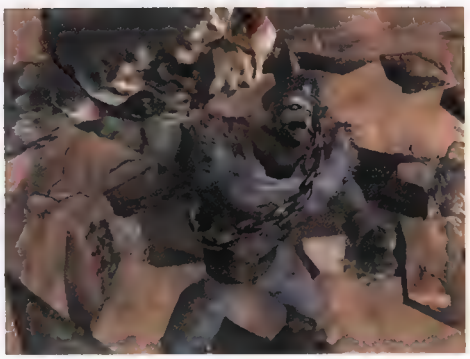
in the marketing of the game. This game contains violent language and behavior and may not be appropriate for persons under the age of 17. It is a comic inte
or similarity to actual persons, living or dead, or to actual events is intended or should be inferred. Any resemblance is coincidental. The makers and publishers
ve
ated game
dentified.

BLOWING CHUNKS

One of the greatest light-gun series of all time just got better.

words michael hobbs



This guy is pissed! Better blow him way.

"*The House of The Dead III* is a perfect example of the genre done right."

Though some may find them passe, I can still really appreciate a good gun game. When this genre is done well, the end result is a visceral experience that only the likes of an online *Quake* match can compare.

Based on a look at an early version of *The House of the Dead III*, I would say this is a perfect example of the genre done right. First of all, this has got to be hands down the best-looking gun game ever created. The backgrounds are astounding in their detail, with the kind of texture res that only the Xbox seems capable of hosting. And wait until you see the zombies explode at the end of your shotgun. We're talking serious chunkification, with an absolutely disturbing amount of gore and body parts flying about the screen. All in good fun.

But graphics and presentation are only part of the equation. Far more important is the flow and energy level of the game; this one was truly designed by masters. There are multiple paths, fantastic enemy situations, and absolutely perfect monster placement.

And it keeps getting better. The final version of the game will also include a full version of *The House of The Dead II*, an absolute classic, making this a seriously awesome proposition for fellow light-gun maniacs. **play**

the house of the dead III — preview

XB

developer: **sega wow entertainment** / publisher: **sega** / available: **fall**

Wanna know how good this game is? *The House of the Dead III* is so damn good, I was enjoying it without the light-gun peripheral. Unprecedented. (There is a gun coming.)

THE EYES OF A BOY. THE SWORD OF A MASTER. THE FIGHT OF HIS LIFE.

グランディア エクストリーム

GRANDIA XTREME

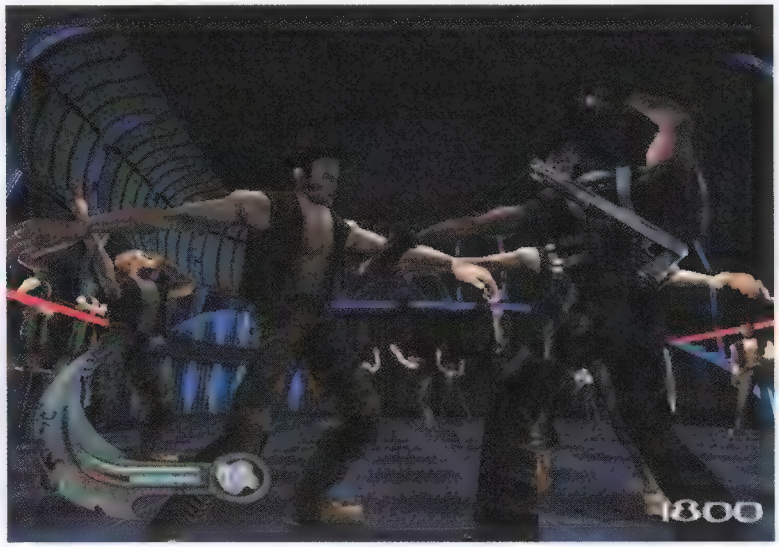
HIS DESTINY WILL BE WRITTEN IN BLOOD.

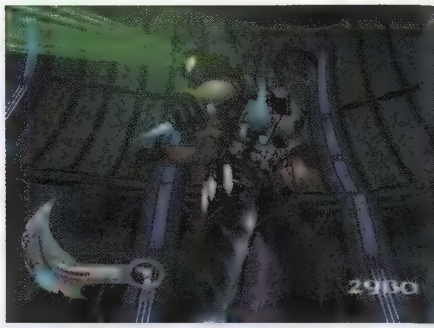
Get ready to come to blows with over 130 types of enemies hell-bent on making mincemeat out of you and your party. Traverse 8 wild elemental lands while discovering the depths of the newly tuned Grandia combat and magic systems and tackling the most brutal Grandia yet. It's not called xtreme for nothing.

DULL BLADE

Another movie-derived game struggles to find its place in the world of videogames.

words dave halverson





This is how we dance on Sprockets!

"I like this franchise and this character, and I have high hopes that the review version will shine a brighter light on *Blade II*."

I'm not a big fan of characters that require steering, especially when they are a pivot point for spinning environments, and that's exactly what *Blade II* seems to be. I also feel like kicking Mucky Foot's version of Whistler square in the teeth for acting like a complete imbecile, but since he doesn't actually impede the gameplay, he can keep his dentures. If you're getting a sneaking feeling that I'm less then thrilled with my preview copy of *Blade II*, well, just hold on.

Blade II is and can only be a somewhat generic action game due to the rather limited scope of the material it's based on. You enter a club filled with the sounds of generic techno and are instructed to "kill everybody in the place." Of course, if you kill one dancer in a group of 20, only two or three will attack, if any, while the rest just keep on dancing until you get around to stabbing them, shooting them, or chopping off their head, so, well, you get the gist. This is a *Blade* videogame. We've been down this road and back again. You have limited ammo, sword power, shield, etc., but you can dole out all of the kicks and punches you want, in all directions, via the right analog, just like in Bruce Lee's generic beat 'em up, *Quest of the Dragon*. There's a slight lag here, and the collision needs work, but it certainly serves the swarming nature of the game, although, like most action games, attackers politely wait until you're finished killing the person in closest proximity, before they decide to attack. I always find that amusing. Blade also has a canned jump/flip that needs a whole lot of work, and a walking strafe that currently triggers violent camera twitch. He also feels way too heavy. This is a clunky engine at best. If you're still getting a sneaking feeling that I'm less then thrilled with my preview copy *Blade II*, well, just hold on...

Blade (although he sports a Mongoloid head) looks pretty damn cool, and carries more cutlery than an Iron Chef. He's not afraid to use it either, via dramatic scenes where he either cores the tops off vamps heads or skewers 'em like bloodsucker kabobs as they flame out in a poof of ashes. He also wields unlimited shuriken power with the ability to target multiple targets and slice of their heads, boomerang style. It's a shame this move requires clicking in on the right analog and charging, but it's the game's most effective unlimited attack. Having played only a level of the game (all my disc would allow), I'm afraid that's all I can report for now. I like this franchise and this character, and have high hopes that the review version (or perhaps the PS2 game) will shine a brighter light on *Blade II*. However, with *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* as its closest competition on Xbox, the odds don't look good. At this point, *Buffy* quite literally slays it. **play**

blade II preview

PS2 XB developer: mucky foot / publisher: activision / available: september

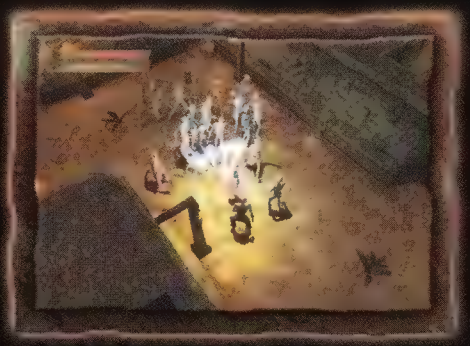
Blade II needs work, but in its defense, this (Xbox) version was early and crashed after level one. Still, with a September release date, it's not looking good.

COMING THIS FALL TO XBOX™

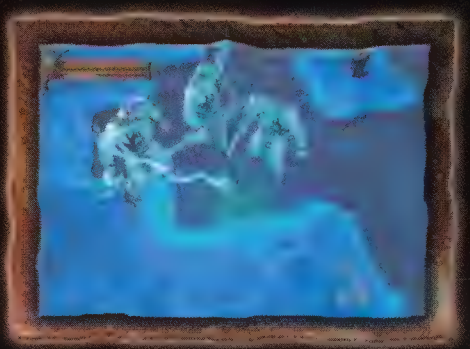
FORGOTTEN REALMS

Baldur's Gate™

DARK ALLIANCE™



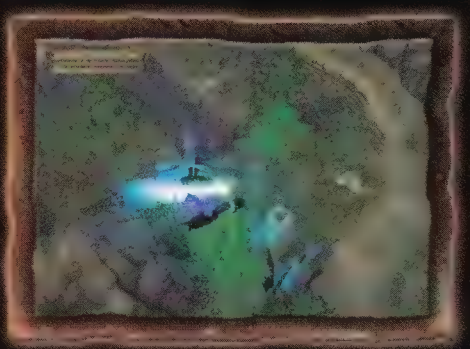
HACK YOUR WAY THROUGH COUNTLESS OPPOSITION



ENCOUNTER MYSTICAL BEASTS

"Xbox owners will receive one fine game in the form of Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance."
– IGN.com

"Like Gauntlet, in the same way that a Ferrari is like a Fiat."
– Official Xbox Magazine



EXPLORE FANTASTIC ENVIRONMENTS

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Blood
Violence
Use of Alcohol

BLACK ISLE Studios

developed by snowblind studios

Interplay

XBOX

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PLAYING WITH THE APOCALYPSE

words

Tell me why this game is a wet dream for geeks?
Michael: [*everyone laughs*] I don't know if it's a wet dream for geeks, but for 3DO, it's a different product. 3DO's never done an M-rated game, but the content of the actual project is something I've wanted to do since I got there. The nature of what it is: The four horsemen of the apocalypse from the bible; the bible is the most popular book in the history of civilization; it has instant name recognition; it's got the best villains ever created; and it's about the final battle of good over evil—the end of the Earth, Armageddon.
Kelly: I just love the fact that we're really getting the chance to go for it on all fronts. The geek fest for me is being able to go for the violence, the adult content, the religious content—they're all pretty edgy where we're pushing it.

Rusty: The darkness, the violence, and I think what keeps me hanging on is the seriousness. Everybody is taking this thing *very* seriously. There's no puffy marshmallow bad guys. [*everyone laughs*] It's all done realistically, taking photo reference, and we've got a bunch of artists that are just amazing at what they do—from texture artists to painters like Dave and Simon. Everyone just knows what they're doin'.
Michael: Yeah, across the board, top talent. When we were doing the story, we were working with a professional writer. We had three separate script evaluations done. For me, though, the cool thing is just taking the biblical nature and twisting that. You know, we're going in the Vatican and Satan's gonna make that his home. And when the player goes through it, at first it's going to look like the Vatican and then as they go deeper and deeper into the level, it's gonna get twisted—it's gonna get darker. I've been given the okay to push the thing as far as I want to push it in the M category, and just physiologically goin' through the Vatican and seeing Michelangelo's frescos all distorted and corrupted—that's an artist's dream. [*everyone laughs*]

A free vacation for "research" purposes, too. So why the *Four Horsemen* initially—obviously it's a great license that you don't have to pay royalties on. Who said, "Let's take this really sacred thing and have fun with it"?
Michael: It was our CEO, Trip Hawkins. He came to me and said, "*Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*. Go!" [Then I said,] "Well, wait a second, the horsemen have to be bad," 'cause in *Revelations* the horsemen are actually God's

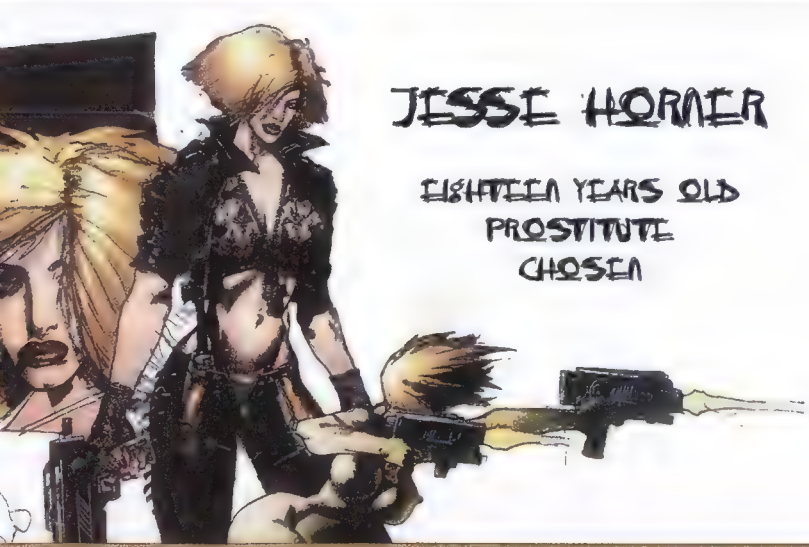
angels that inflict devastation on Earth. At that point, we just did a whole lot of research.
Dave: I think that the appeal of the characters is that they function on two levels. You've got your typical bad guy; then you have all this physiological stuff underneath. Famine is based in reality—people were starving. It has this deep physiological underpinning, then you have this cool character on the surface.
Michael: The creation of the characters was kind of interesting—it's almost like an art assignment. You could give it to a class and say, "What's your vision of Famine, or what's your vision of War?" And there's so many different ways that you could go. War was a particularly hard character, because from a creative direction standpoint, I didn't want it to be during one time period; I wanted to bring in, throughout history, elements of war. Knights, spears, World War I gas masks. Internally, we were just having a huge problem. Then we gave Simon a bunch of our content, and the guy just nailed War. We decided to make Pestilence a woman, and we wanted some sex appeal in the game, and she seemed like the right one to be a woman—just based on disease, venereal disease and all that. But then the twist was, if she's really sexy, how do we make her scary and dark? In the game, she'll be morphing back and forth from her gross form to her beautiful form; and she also has several attacks, one in which she vomits locusts.

Proportionally, compared to other 3DO fare, this is a gigantic title. What incited the philosophy switch of the company, because 3DO is notorious for creating really low budget titles like the *Army Men* franchise?
Kelly: Well, we've undergone a massive switch company wide. We used to do 30 titles a year, and this year we're doing eight. We pretty much told the market that we're not shipping that much this year because we're spending a year-and-a-half on another round of products. Because what worked at the end of a PlayStation One cycle is not what works at the beginning of a new generation. At the end of the PSone cycle, it was mass market. There were so many millions of PSone's out there, you could do mass market titles that were simple titles on a simple theme. Now, the demographic has grown older and wiser. It's not like people stop playing games when they hit 18; we're playing them into our 20s and 30s.
Michael: The attitude of the company is pretty much, "Let's focus on quality now."

For the game itself, at least based on what you've shown us, it appears to be straight on, blood red action. But it's hard to judge, since it's still a year off. So what kind of gameplay are you aiming for?
Michael: Well, it's a little deeper than that. There is some exploration. But, basically, the focus for us is the combat—it's the shooting and the melee combat. There's a few games like *Max Payne* that are very focused in what they do, and I want to follow that path. What's cool, though, is our "skill tree." So in the game, as you're going through and battling bad guys, there's also innocents. When somebody dies, there's a soul. So if the evil enemies get that soul, they get stronger and they're harder to kill. If you get it, you get experience points that you can apply to the "skill tree," which has three divergent paths. You could learn to do combat more melee style or more just guns or projectile range, or you could do a mix. And depending on what path you go down, you unlock new finishing moves, too.

The film also marks an intense collaboration between all sorts of industries—comic book artists, motion picture stunt choreographers, high-profile voice actors. Why did you feel the need to bring in this abundance of outside talent?
Michael: I'll let Rusty jump in on this, but for me I wanted an all-star lineup on the product—I wanted nothin' but the best talent we could find—just to insure the chances of success. Rusty was the guy that originally came to me and said, "Bisley—Bisley's the guy."
Rusty: It's something that we've tinkered with before in our previous games, like with *BattleTanx*, we did the whole comic-book-style intro and that's how we brought the story across with paintings by me and Dave. Now we have the ability to contact big talent and hang onto talent we've had before—just growing in that sense. This time we can, so we're bringin' in Lance Henriksen, we've got Tim Curry, we've got Traci Lords, we've got Dave, we've got Simon Bisley. **play**

<< our apocalyptic chat continues **next month** >>



JESSE HORNER

EIGHTEEN YEARS OLD
PROSTITUTE
CHOSEN

JIMMY RAY FLINT

PREACHER
SERIAL KILLER
CHOSEN

"The bible is the most popular book in the history of civilization; it has instant name recognition..."

Four Horsemen's voice actors: (from left) Traci Lords, Tim Curry, and Lance Henriksen.

DIRTY DOG

Rob, cheat, and deceive your way to happiness as a doggy only Stimpy could love—Crank.

words dave halverson

I think it's safe to assume that somewhere within the deep underbelly of Midway, someone called a meeting. While they haven't gone away from their bread and butter (arcade sports and racing, fitting *Gauntlet* for anything with a screen and, of course, *Mortal Kombat*) they have added a diverse (and damn impressive-looking) selection of console-specific titles to the mix, including *Haven*, *Dr. Muto*, *Freaky Flyers*, and their latest, *Crank the Weasel*.

Platformers have been around since the dawn of time, but not like this. Crank's gameplan is to get the hell out of Dodge, or in this case, Scratchtown, to a paradise retreat called, ironically, Paradise Island, where he can live out his days in the lap of luxury. But dexterity alone won't get him on the plane. In order to amass enough cash for the trip, Crank uses his "special abilities" to rip people off! Now there's something you don't see everyday. Beyond the usual platforming antics, deception and thievery are woven into the gameplay, with Crank settling the score at pawn shops, turning his loot into cash. I guess you can take the dirty dog out of the city, but you can't take the city out of the dirty dog. **play**

"Beyond the usual platforming antics, deception and thievery are woven into the gameplay."

crank the weasel — preview

PS2 — developer: midway / publisher: midway / available: 2003

Now this looks like something worth humping Midway's leg over.

MIAMI NICE

Rockstar takes its show on the road all the way to sunny Florida—tell grandma to stay inside

words dave halverson

Once upon a time, there was a game called *GTA III*. It was a game that "mature" gamers and even celebrities loved—a game that captured the hearts and imaginations of anyone willing to run over hookers, kill for money, and generally cause a public nuisance. *GTA III* put the "C" in cartoon violence, just barely squeaking in under the "it's not real" radar, unlike the upcoming *The Getaway*, which for some odd reason seems worlds dirtier, for lack of a better word, than *GTA* could ever hope to be.

Where *III* was rough and dark, with a decidedly gritty, hard-core urban vibe, taking the same aesthetic on the road to Miami Beach circa the '80s, well, that's just a stroke of pure genius. South Beach, neon lights, speed boats, g-strings (the ones on the girls, at least) and freaks galore to smash and use as human shields...I'm going directly to the Bird Cage to kick some ass. Think we'll meet up with Scarface? Maybe have a run-in with Crockett and Tubs? And think of the

[redacted] play

"Taking the *GTA III* aesthetic on the road to Miami Beach circa the '80s, well, that's just a stroke of pure genius."

Won't show on this shirt...

gta: vice city

PS2

developer: **dma** / publisher: **rockstar games** / available: **october**

More dirty deeds done dirt cheap on the PS2 should make this holiday season another one to remember.

KATANA BURN

Tenchu 3 takes the ninja franchise to a heightened next-gen world of blood, blades and body bags (well, if they had those in feudal Japan).

words jon m gibson

"Much like a bad divorce, sometimes fighting isn't the best choice and you just might want to run away and hide from it all," says Horie. But your foes will chase.

As this year's E3 made quite evident, the onslaught of the ninja has begun. There's the return of the old school translated into next-gen specs—Sega's *Shinobi* and Tecmo's *Ninja Gaiden*—but there's also a different brand of warrior on the prowl. *Tenchu 3: Wrath of Heaven* is the *only* authentic game of the trio, focusing on the stealthy art of the ancient Japanese ninja rather than pure arcade action. Not to say that there isn't a hefty dose of the visceral; it's merely more premeditated than quick, stylish slices.

"The PS2 is allowing us to draw much further and in more detail than in the past, allowing the player to see the enemies from further away—e.g. standing on a rooftop peering down on guards," says Tad Horie, producer, Activision Japan. "So the player gets to plan who to kill first, who to kill next and where to kill them so guards don't see their dead bodies. Players can stand there and observe enemies from far away."

Dynamic lighting effects are steeped into each of the nine immense, traditional Japanese battlegrounds—brimming with stacked temples, thick bamboo brush, and ridge-primped caves—generally glowing with rich moonlight and the vibrancy of a fiery torch. In the *very* early version of the game that **play** was invited to demo, slight raindrops were making a muddy mess of a presumably abandoned town. Puddles were scattered everywhere, reflecting the mirror image of each character to perfection—a delicate touch that helps to create a seemingly calm, yet infinitely fatale environment. Stepping into the water, urging even the smallest splash, and an enemy around the corner might be alerted.

Such highly evolved AI is a product of the jump from PSone to PS2, as Horie explains: "The advanced AI really adds a whole new dimension

"*Tenchu 3* focuses on the stealthy art of the ancient Japanese ninja rather than pure arcade action."

to the gameplay, especially during battles. For instance, enemies step forward and back to maintain their desirable distance depending on the weapon they are using; a guard with a spear will try to stay within range of his spear but out of range of your sword; guards with bow and arrows will stay at a distance to shoot as many arrows as he can; enemy ninjas will do flips over you to try to attack you from behind, etc. Players will have a different battle experience every time." And unlike its predecessors, the foes of *Tenchu 3* won't immediately lose their will if you jump onto a rooftop—they're up for a chase, whether it's grounded or on shingles.

Yet, you're not left completely to the wolves; your counterattacks are plentiful. Besides being able to earn new combo attacks after completing tallied stealth kills in each level (innate "ninjutsu" skills), you've got an arsenal of familiar (and a few unfamiliar) weapons at your disposal. Rice pods make for a subtle poison blow, the grappling hook allows you to manipulate your enemies from afar (and climb effortlessly atop buildings), fire darts (thrown using a crosshair targeting system) explode on contact, classical shurikens act well as indiscreet ammo (and can be recovered if you miss an enemy), and a powerful fire shockwave consults possibly the most unrealistic powers in the game to singe enemy ninjas (absolutely everything isn't "authentic," apparently). Finishing a level by practicing stealthy precision—moving through the dark with grace, avoiding all detection—you'll be rewarded even more special items.

The action of each level is extremely varied as well, offering players multiple pathways to branch off into. "Once you've finished the mission one way, there is always another route or another path left to explore. Some routes might be a shortcut, a long-cut, or even a dead end; some routes might have bonus items for you to pick up. Each time you play, the enemies will be in different places too, affecting the strategic aspect of how to get through the mission without being seen."

Then take all the bonuses, learned combos and priceless ninja tactics and apply them to the new multiplayer modes. There's co-operative, team-oriented missions for peaceful friends looking to serve for the greater good of feudal Japan, and a Hunter-Hunted deathmatch style of play for more aggressive pals.

But the combat will have to wait; *Tenchu 3* doesn't ship until next spring. **play**

tenchu 3: the wrath of heaven preview

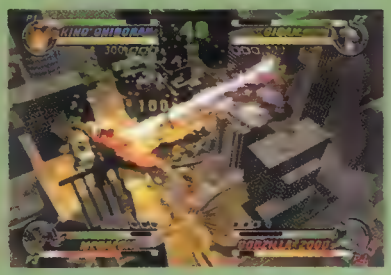
PS2 developer: K2 / publisher: activision / available: spring 2003

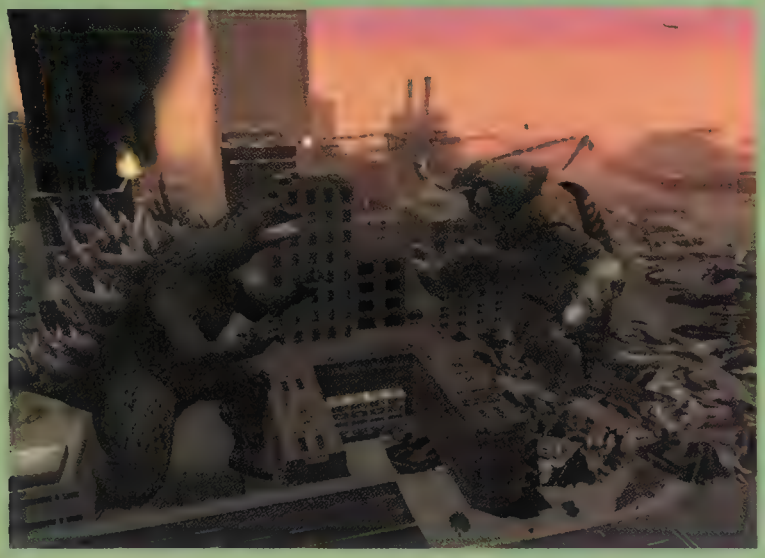
Tenchu 3 sets itself apart from the pack by proving that it's more than just an arcade actioner – there are authentic ninja principles here.

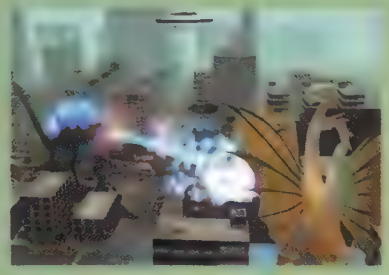
MEAN GREEN

[illegible]

words dave halverson







Get your freaky ass down here...

"Someone in the U.S. has actually taken the beloved Godzilla franchise and turned it into something worthy of the material."

It was bound to happen sooner or later. Someone in the U.S. has actually taken the beloved Godzilla license and turned it into something worthy of the material. The memories of Emmerich's anvil-headed leapin' lizard and that sorry-ass Dreamcast game begin to melt away almost immediately as *Godzilla: Destroy All Monsters* gets underway in decidedly campy fashion.

An alien race with a penchant for TV news bent on, of course, enslaving us all, interrupts our regularly scheduled program to direct us Earthlings to the nearest "processing facility," where we will be lovingly reprogrammed to serve their every whim as they suck the resources out of our planet, because "that's what they do."

To insure total mayhem ensues, they also open the gates of Monster Island, where it turns out we keep all of our potentially lethal sci-fi giant monsters, and place them under mind control, all except for one, at least—whichever you choose to do your bidding.

Anyone who remembers *King of the Monsters* on the old Neo Geo, just imagine that formula brought to stunning 3D life, with meticulously modeled monsters, convincing cities, killer effects, and sounds that shake and quake like your screen is going to crack. If it's adrenaline-charged fighting you're after, look no further (obligatory box quote anyone?). The cityscapes, especially locales like Seattle (where Nintendo is headquartered, oops) are exceptionally devised, with buildings taller than the monsters, and smaller ones to unearth and hurl at your opponent, surrounded by harbors, bustling business centers, power plants, etc., all painstakingly re-created to look and react like the real thing.

Titanic combatants demand an epic control scheme, a game designed to feel as if you're controlling massive, lumbering tonnage, rather than simply adapting standard fighting controls to lumbering characters, and this is where *DoM* really delivers. Strategy, depending on whom you're fighting with and against, plays a major role in each battle. Sometimes it's best to run and attack long range with laser or fire breath, other times hurling objects or putting together throws and combos may be the key. The game's overall nuances and controls are tuned specifically to heighten each exciting scenario. This is one of those rare fighting games where you'll get butterflies in your stomach, as, for instance, you (as, say, Godzilla) and Rodan are both down to a sliver of energy, positioning for that last move. A massive three-headed dragon is circling in for the kill...run and charge for a breath attack, or go in for the kill, praying it doesn't have the energy or inclination to do the same?

With the fighting genre flat-lining, stuck in a cycle of old characters constantly being recycled with better visuals, hoping to somehow get you to buy the same game again and again, my advice is to pass them by, and reach for something that's likely to paint a big green smile on your face. **play**

godzilla: destroy all monsters melee — preview

GC — developer: **pipeworks** / publisher: **infogrames** / available: **fall**

[illegible]

A KNIGHT'S TALE

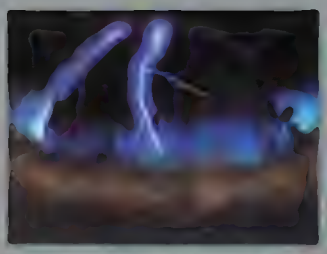
The wonderful *Suikoden* series continues with a new, 3D face.

words brady fiechter

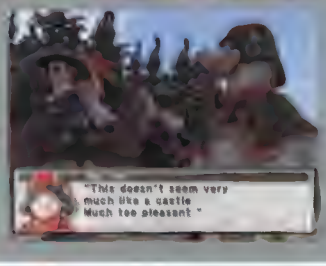
The goal of any great role-playing game is to track us down the furthest lines where we can't escape until the hero has lost his first love and saved the world from a tragic end. Like the first two entries in this under-appreciated, emotionally mature series, Suikoden IV is taking me to that magical place again, creating a living world that vibrates with powerful villains and towering foes, building trains and treacherous journeys.

Suikoden III tells an involving story of love and redemption, of commitment and the consequences of unchecked passion. All themes are made for delving pulling with determination from palpable conflict of telling a cautionary, linear story, the game follows its characters through several chapters, allowing you to personally choose who you want to develop. I was mildly turned off by the approach, considering it as a gimmick and a forced way to lengthen the playtime. But as the story begins to reveal its hues, the interlocking [illegible] grabs hold and never lets go.

"...Suikoden III grabs hold and never lets go."



Everything's not CG, but the look of the battle scenes, enjoyed by the engineers at Konami



suikoden III — preview

PS2 — developer: Konami Sys. | publisher: Konami | available: November

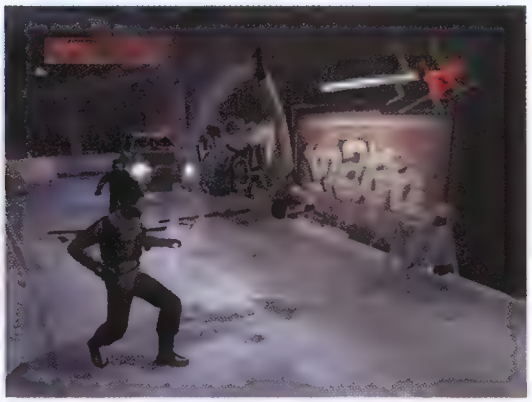
Transfer your data from Suikoden II and build a mercenary army, command a powerful stronghold, and the fates of [illegible] of determined warriors.

Superman Shadow of Apokolips

PS2

developer: **melbourne house** / publisher: **infogrames** / available: **september**

Three weeks from final code, *Shadow of Apokolips* looks like it's set to deliver the first great Superman game (save for a tiny bit of chug and a few collision hiccups).



Dark Angel

PS2 XB

developer: **radical entertainment** / publisher: **sierra** / available: **q1 '03**

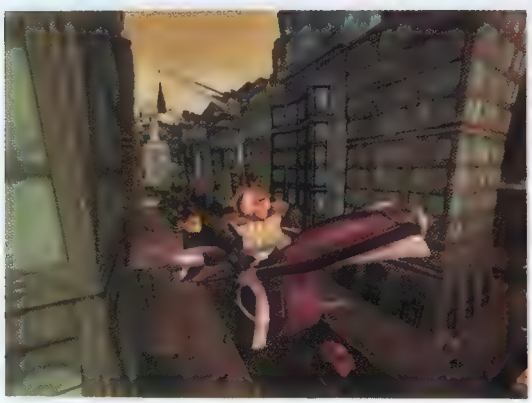
Cameron/Eglee productions, Sierra, and Fox have put their genetically enhanced Revlon model, Dark Angel, in Radical Entertainment's (*Dark Summit*) hands. First shots—check.

Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance

PS2 GC XB

developer: **midway** / publisher: **midway** / available: **fall**

Say what you will about *MK*; *DA* is looking great, having been reinvented from the blood-stained ground up, darker and more punishing then ever. With Adema on board for the title track, it'll sound good, too.



Freaky Flyers

PS2 GC XB

developer: **midway** / publisher: **midway** / available: **fall**

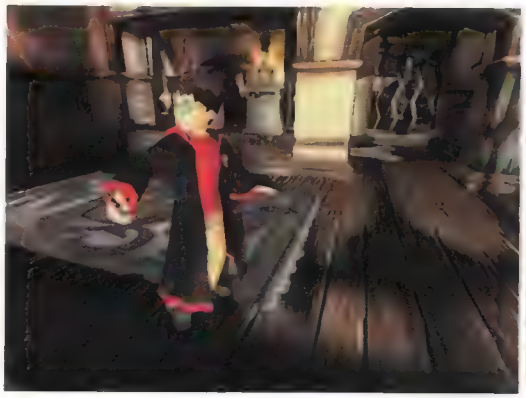
Racing adventure never looked so good, all 25 levels of it (stories too!), so let's hope it plays as well. This could be one of the year's surprises.

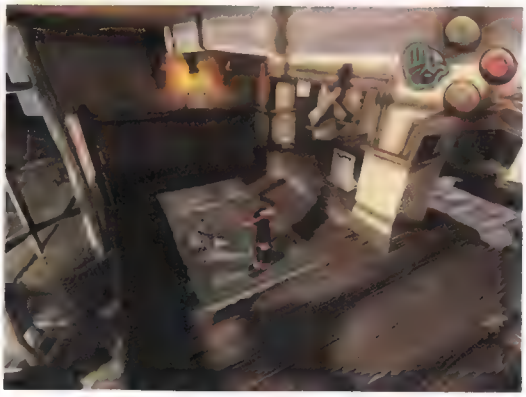
Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets

PC PS2 GC XB

developer: **ea** / publisher: **ea** / available: **fall**

Harry's second year at Hogwarts will be his first on the latest trio of consoles, and from the looks of it, will be just as magical Journey to the heart of a land of sorcery...



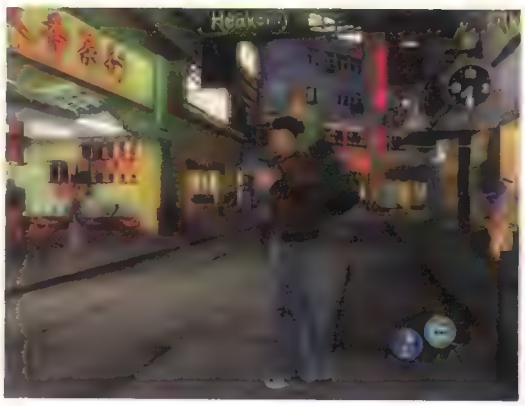


Shenmue II

XB

developer: **sega am 2** / publisher: **microsoft** / available: **november**

The 90-minute movie will come bundled with the Xbox-exclusive *Shenmue II*, as if we needed more reasons to celebrate this title.



Dr. Muto

PS2 GC XB

developer: **midway** / publisher: **midway** / available: **winter**

Ditto for Muto. Midway's poised to have one helluva' 4th quarter. Of all their latest offerings, *Muto* and *Haven* are our most highly-anticipated, save for the odd *MK* nut.

Defender

PS2 GC XB

developer: **midway** / publisher: **midway** / available: **fall**

Defend the human race from alien invasion in 17 all new campaigns, based on the '80s uber-classic Atari shooter. It'll be tuff to beat Minter's Jaguar LSD-fest.

Dark Cloud 2

PS2

developer: **scei** / publisher: **sony** / available: **fall**

Taking action and creation gaming to entirely new heights, DCy 2 looks to improve on the original in every concievable way, quite a feat considering how great a game that was.

BMX XXX!

PS2 XB GC

developer: **z axis** / publisher: **acclaim** / available: **october**

Proving they'll stop at nothing to get people to bask in their BMX prowess, Acclaim has said "to hell with it!" and stripped their riders naked. That's what we call X-games.

Rise to Honor (working title)

PS2

developer: **scea foster city studio** / publisher: **sony** / available: **fall 2003**

Jackie's got one, Bruce has one... and soon Jet will too. Sony's taking the lightning that is Jet Li and transferring it into an intense action game. Will it be the One?

Project Gotham 2

XB

developer: **bizarre creations** / publisher: **microsoft** / available: **2003**

What some would call the premier Xbox racer is taking its success into sequel territory, boasting more of everything.

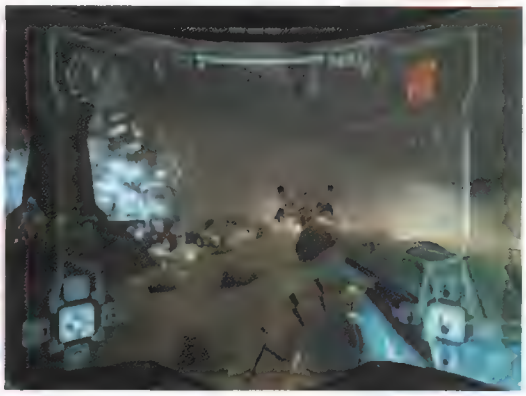
Nintendo

Metroid Prime

GC

developer: **retro studios** / publisher: **nintendo** / available: **november**

What more can be said about this latest *Metroid*? That it's amazing? A visual spectacle? One of the greatest FPS games every made? We're crossing our fingers on that last one...



Star Fox Adventures

GC

developer: **rare** / publisher: **nintendo** / available: **september**

After seeing what the GC can do with *Mario Sunshine*, Rare's most ambitious project yet is getting us even more worked up. This is gonna be epic.

The Legend of Zelda

GC

developer: **nintendo** / publisher: **nintendo** / available: **spring**

Have you ever heard of Zelda? Would you like to look at some more screenshots? Do you want to play this game as much as we do? Please don't answer "no" to question No. 1.

Mario Party 4

GC

developer: **nintendo** / publisher: **nintendo** / available: **august**

Mario and friends are showing up for the fourth world war of Nintendo board games. Lots like the others, but with more than enough cool added touches and a fun look.

Lord of the Rings: Fellowship of the Ring

PS2 XB GC

developer: **surreal** / publisher: **universal int.** / available: **fall**

Looking stunning, echoing the majesty of the film, Universal's *Fellowship of the Ring* shocked us all when it arrived just before press time.

Primal

PS2

developer: **scee** / publisher: **scea** / available: **january**

We've only begun to scratch the surface on this atmospheric, ambitious adventure, but if early impressions mean anything, *Tomb Raider* has some serious competition.

Evolution Worlds

DC

developer: **sting** / publisher: **ubi soft** / available: **fall**

The sequel to Sting's original Dreamcast dungeon rpg may seem prosaic, because it is. The game's saving grace lies in its character designs and innovatve weaponary.

Deathrow: Feel the Pain M@therf*cker!

XB

developer: **south end int.** / publisher: **ubi soft** / available: **october**

Yes, it's true, the company that brought us *Rayman* is releasing a game based on violence with the word "M@therf*cker" in the title. Is that the sea boiling?

066 quantum redshift
068 ty the tasmanian tiger
070 robotech: battlecry
072 kingdom hearts
076 the terminator
078 .hack
080 turok evolution
083 animal crossing
083 dynasty warriors 3
083 ferrari f355
083 super monkey ball 2
084 crash bandicoot: twoc
084 mystic heroes
084 nascar thunder 2003
084 need for speed hot pursuit 2
085 aggressive inline
085 kelly slater's pro surfing
085 matt hoffman's pro bmx 2
085 tekken 4
086 advance notice

SILENT SPEED

Riding on a cushion of air, *Quantum Redshift* emerges as the pinnacle of futuristic racers.

Dave Hawkins

Currently, Team Green is working on rebuilding their Xbox brand much as Sony had to following the birth of the PlayStation. Unlike Sega and Nintendo, who began abandoning brands dating back to the late '80s and early '90s, Microsoft began from a dead stop little more than a year ago. So far, they've trotted out Earth's best FPS, *Halo*, and are closing in on the pinnacle of mech shoot'em, with *MechAssault*. Action/platform with *Blinx*, and futuristic racing with no-doubt Quantum *Redshift*. Taking into account Xbox Live, they are currently neck-and-neck with the best hardcore 3D action game since the days of Nintendo, Dot Vectrex, the pinnacle of free form gameplay, Jet Set *Future*, the king of 3D shoot'em, Panzer Dragoon *Orta*, the best fighter on the market, DOA 2, and the one and only true next-generation guilty pleasure, *Tee Jam & Earl: Mission to Earth*. Next year, they will add to the mix *Tork* (which should close the book on platformers), *Psychonauts* (which should close the book on everything ever) and *Halo 2*. Which will then eat the book. Add Xbox live and the new price point and... hey! Why aren't they winning? Well, *Quantum Redshift* is here to slide them ever closer to the brass ring.

In an attempt to out WipEout WipEout, Curly Monsoon first constructed a longer, wider, more diverse set of international courses, and then added to each indigenous character sets, creating a realistic circuit, not unlike the one Renny Harlin fashioned for the film *Driven*. With a sturdy framework in place, the team then began the task of making it look and play great, and, while I have no idea who these guys are, man, did they hit the bull's eye. In terms of visuals, you simply cannot—better not—ask for anything more. Like any great Xbox game, they've coated everything with bump-mapping (the console's single finest component, setting it apart from the competition) and, beyond the bumps, particle effects, water, snow, fume trails, and weather look almost too good. Distracted by the majesty of the visuals, it's difficult sometimes to keep your head in the game. Its role-playing aesthetic is also thoroughly fleshed out. Used in the past as a gimmick, with barely any impact on the actual races and game progression, these storylines are played out on the track and off, via full character models, animation, and subtitled voice speech, with each culminating in a Nemesis Challenge, awarding you the winner's persona and car. With 16 characters, the depth of the game is almost bottomless.

The most important aspect of the game—control and physics—may not be what you'd expect, especially if you've recently come away from WipEout Fusion. Rather than copy, CM has wisely (I think) carved out their own control niche. Quantum isn't nearly as fussy. You'll certainly need to dial in course memorization and the best lines and boost/weapon dispersal, but doing so isn't quite as surgical. Rather than sweeping turns, Quantum it requires a more poised approach, pivoting and thrusting. The cars are also on the lighter side and have no qualms sliding up steep sidewalls, or flying over impassable lines on the course. The result is a combination of the balls-out and surgical aesthetics, equaling one blistering adrenaline-charged package.

The overall experience, depth, audio and visual aptitude that *Quantum Redshift* doles out, for a first outing especially, makes it instant franchise material. If the market for this amazing genre has remained strong and sales support it, I believe it's safe to assume that this series is only in first gear. **play**

The character driven elements in *Quantum Redshift* add greatly to the overall presentation of the game, and with 16 combatants, the depth is almost bottomless.

"Distracted by the [redacted] of the visuals, it's difficult sometimes to keep your head in the game."

quantum redshift

play rating

developer: **curly monsters** / publisher: **microsoft** / available: **now**

A dreamy, futuristic racer unlike any other, all new, all exclusive, all Xbox.

TY RAID

EA's shockingly apt new platformer *Rangs* in Q4 with a mighty roar.

words dave halverson

I would have been quick to jump on the Ty band wagon—if there was one—which in hindsight I'm rather proud of. Everyone else in the office balked, quibbling that an EA platformer starring a Tiger that looked like an angry Muppet just couldn't be very good, and it isn't...good, it's great, overflowing with wicked technology and hub-based fun that keeps going, and going...

Although new on the scene, it's not because Ty wasn't long in the tooth; Krome has been grooming their little tiger for years, the game just wasn't hyped before its time, which I think was wise. Ty leapt out of the bush shortly after his May debut, giving me ample time to run him ragged well before he hit the streets—an increasingly rare occurrence of late. By this, his second appearance in **play**, you should be able to run out and buy *Ty the Tasmanian Tiger*, so I recommend you do, if you have a tendency towards critter warfare.

Ty is out to save his ancestors, who have been sucked into one of those wacky parallel universes while battling their natural enemy, Boss Cass. Cass was (and still is) out to collect five sacred talismans that would give him absolute power, but the Tasmanian tiger clan foiled his plan, scattering the talismans just as they were pulled into the abyss. Years later, having been raised by Bilbies (don't ask) thinking he was alone in the world, Ty discovers that his pride is still alive, and that all he needs to do to free them is find the talismans before Boss Cass does, place them in their scared sockets, and watch the credits roll. Now that I've intrigued you with that deep, emotional plot, I'll just cut to the chase, since I covered most of this ground last month.

Ty is built on a massive hub with adjacent portals leading to different worlds overflowing in ultra-creative level design and everything that makes platformers growl, accessible by collecting Thunder Eggs to feed the Talisman Machine and open more. While exploring each massive sprawl, Ty attacks by biting, or via his "Techno Rangs," which can be upgraded throughout by collecting gears. The rest of Ty's moves run the genre gamut with paddling, swimming, sliding, gliding, sniping and, of course, riding the odd giant, ferocious beast. Three hundred opals will earn Ty a Thunder Egg, as will freeing five caged Bilbies and completing certain tasks in each level: pretty standard stuff in terms of progression, but in terms of execution, well, that's where these mates live. What isn't standard about *Ty* is the game's scripting and vocal talent, which is hilarious, with Aussie flavor marinated into every facet of the adventure. Plus, Ty himself is a really funny little creature, like Foghorn Leghorn's kid, small but revved up.

The game is also beautiful beyond measure, with water, waving grass, snow, mud, and other terrain effects that, at least for now, are pretty much unequalled, and boast sound effects to match. All of this isn't instantly discernable, as the game gets better and better with each passing stage, but overall, by game's end, you'll be blown away by the spectacle of it all. Admittedly, I'm intrigued by such things more than most, but I really can't think of a single game with Ty's level of organic detail. Payment is made by way of the character models, which are simplistic as a result (although they get the job done), but I'm sure you'll agree that it's a bargain considering these worlds.

There are loads of other aspects of *Ty* to elaborate on, but seeing as how space does not allow, just take my word for it: EA now officially has a mascot worth celebrating that doesn't run on grass or endorse his balls. **play**

If he catches you you're through!

"Electronic Arts now officially has a mascot worth celebrating that doesn't run on grass or endorse his balls."

ty the tasmanian tiger

play rating

XB PS2 GC

developer: **krome studios** / publisher: **electronic arts** / available: **now**

So he wears freaky shorts and walks upright, he's the coolest new critter on the block, and he's got some muscle behind him!

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Let the battle begin in this system defining arcade fighter.

TEEN T — CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Suggestive Themes
Violence

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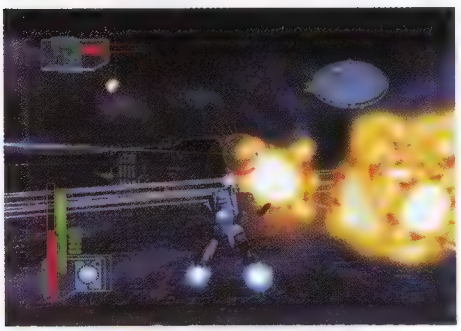
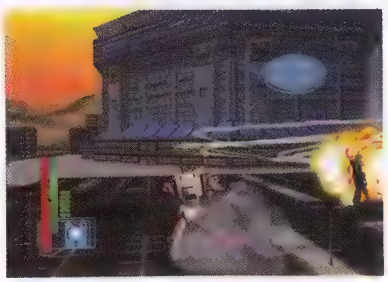
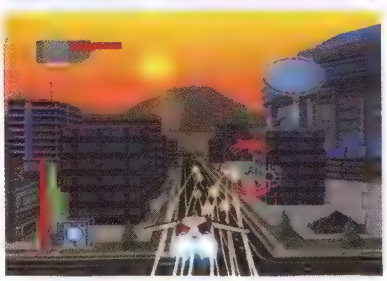
VAPOR TRAILS

Harmony Gold, TDK, and Vicious Cycle deliver the Robotech game fans have been waiting for.

words dave halverson







It's all about the trademark explosions and vapor trails, which as you can see are well represented.

War torn and battle scarred, Jack Archer takes to the land and skies in TDK's ode to *Macross—Robotech Battlecry*. Since the game is addled with artfully drawn stills over which the story is narrated by Jack himself, Robotech newbies will quickly grasp and hopefully become intrigued by the dramatic turn of events surrounding a war interrupted to study an alien technology (a massive vessel deemed Super Dimension Fortress) that would eventually lead to the near annihilation of the human race. The complexion of Earth forever altered, the population relies on the Robotech Defense Force for protection against the invading alien forces, the Zentraedi. As RDF Wolf Squadron pilot Jack Archer, you fly the unfriendly skies and patrol the ground in a Veritech fighter, a transforming robot built on the very technology derived from the alien craft.

Battlecry developers Vicious Cycle chose cel-shading as the technique of choice in bringing the beloved series to life, for obvious reasons. The simplistic textures not only bode well for the anime look and feel but presumably allow them to handle large environments with ease, placing an emphasis on animation and heavily occupied scenarios, rather than display fewer forces in lieu of models and environments with more complexity. They do a nice job of applying a polish to bring it off for sure, although I can't say I wouldn't prefer a harder, more metallic feel. When all is said and done, given the game's multi-console aspirations and anime theme, I believe the right decision was made.

It's the gameplay that really counts anyway, especially seeing as how amidst a sea of Japanese-bred *Macross* games, there's never really been a very good one. That fact has now changed: *Battlecry* not only looks, feels, and sounds like the real thing, but it also plays like it, with missions designed explicitly to take advantage of the Veritech's abilities. The mission-ops follow a dramatic story arc varying between assorted land and air assaults. Search and destroy, protection, sniping, and just plain old-fashioned air combat are all handled, balanced and integrated into the story with great care. The designers have done a great job on the targeting system especially, adopting a separate cross-hair for leading your target into missile attacks. And on the ground, strafing, targeting enemies, and boosting are similarly well implemented, making the game easy to assimilate and quick to master. The overall result is a *Robotech* fan's dream come true (the amount of "Paint Designs" and extras to unlock, like cast interviews, is staggering) but also a unique mission-based mech game that (finally) breathes some fresh air into an otherwise stale category. If you're considering *Gun Metal* or any other mission- based giant robot game, do yourself a favor and follow the alphabet over to "R," at least until *MechAssault* and *RAD* hit later this year. Now would somebody please make me a good game based on *Evangelion*... **play**

robotech battlecry — play rating

PS2 XB GC

developer: **vicious cycle** / publisher: **tdk mediactive** / available: **now**

One of the oldest, most revered Japanese animation franchises in the world finally gets its day in the sun. Grab the collector's edition on this one...

VIDEO GAME HAS-BEENS

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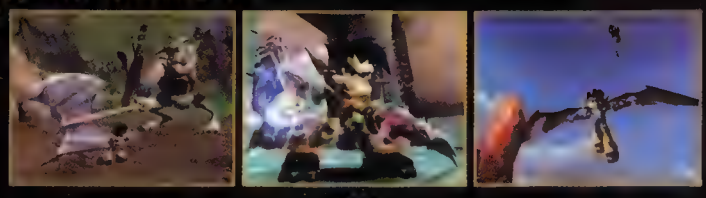

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Violence

XBOX

PlayStation 2

NINTENDO GAMECUBE

Acclaim

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MAGIC KINGDOM

Square and Disney prove it's a small world after all by collaborating and Kerspoinking the magic into your PS2.

words dave halverson

absurd amalgam, and it is. Leave it to the two entertainment goliaths to turn that into a positive.

The ticket for your journey reads "admit one to Kingdom Hearts," and as expected, it is, at the very least, one of the most fantastical, well-spoken and immersive tales ever spun. The quality of Square's modelers and designers, combined with the Disney universe, makes for a gaming experience, on a visual level, that is a true spectacle. The state of the models, both Disney and Square, are beyond belief, exhibiting smoothness, color blending and shading and animation worthy of an award.

But what of the gameplay elements? *Kingdom Hearts*, after all, is not a turn-based RPG, the company's strong suit, but rather, an action-adventure laden with platforming. In this respect, *Kingdom Hearts* is very good, but not great. The

"The quality of Square's designs, combined with the Disney universe, makes for a gaming experience that is a true spectacle."

In-game models of this calibur and design prowess can still only be found under the Square auspice.

boss battles and execution are glorious, but the interface, along with certain elements of the level design, are a little rough around the edges.

Leaving the confines of Destiny Island, where you're directed to familiarize yourself with the game's basic controls and introduced to the life-altering chain of events (I'm not compelled to regurgitate the story; it's special and should be experienced and interpreted individually), Sora, the lead player, sets out to find his friends (among other things) by exploring several bastions of the Disney universe. Stopping at themed worlds, he'll interact with Disney- and Square-indigenous cast members in decidedly (and refreshingly for Square) action-oriented scenarios. Sora is one of the most spectacular videogame characters ever devised, while the girl of his dreams, Kairi, actually just may be. Where was she when I was 14?

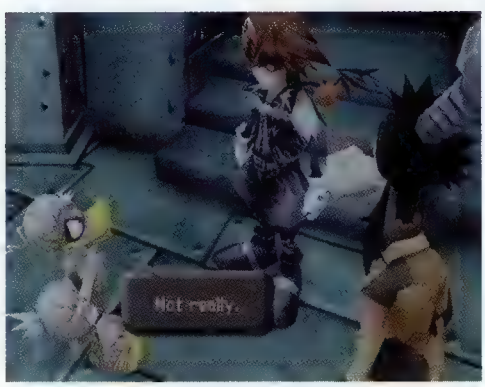
Transportation to each world is handled via 3D shooting stages that look like something off the Jaguar; seriously, they're awful, and have no place in the game. We'll not speak of them again (someone obviously lost a bet).

The event-driven levels themselves are gorgeous, painstakingly detailed environments, puzzle-action heavy and loaded with fair amounts of platforming and exploration, on top of oodles of lock-on fighting, as minions of "The Heartless" attack in swarms. Dealing with them (by locking-on and whacking the crap out of them), although repetitive, is well implemented, and due to upgrades you can obtain for Sora's weapon, the Keyblade, never gets old (well, maybe it gets a little old, but comparatively speaking, it's a great system). Events (bouts of speaking parts where the characters interact) transpire as you return to certain areas, after completing certain goals. The old axiom applies: talk to everybody and when in doubt, backtrack. Each event sparks a new scenario, leading up to the world finale, which never fails to astound. *Kingdom Hearts'* bosses are some of the best ever, and wait till you start to summon the likes of Mushu or Bambi...now there's something you don't see everyday.

Where the levels go astray is in the platforming bits. Perilous jumps are hard for the wrong reasons. Instead of precision, the real test is in dealing with a slight lag in animation, and Sora's massive shoes, which render edge control very sketchy. Additionally, maneuvers like swinging on vines are command-driven rather than based on timing, and using magic and items on the run is often a confusing proposition. With camera rotation on the L2 & R2 triggers (hard to believe Square doesn't realize how important it is to have this on the right analog) and target lock-on-and-off toggled on R1, with shortcuts to spells via L1 and a button...well, things get whacky in the heat of battle. Even opening simple chests requires a menu command. You get used to it, but it's not on par with the genre's best. Once you come to grips with all of these Square-isms (anyone remember *Brave Fencer*?), the game is truly an experience to treasure.

Haley Joel Osment and all of the voice talent —which includes David Gallagher (*Ally McBeal*) NSYNC dude Lance Bass, Mandy Moore (*The Princess Diaries*) and the likes of Danny Devito and James Woods reprising their film roles— deliver serious acting chops. They all obviously embraced this interactive opportunity, which leads to this game's true Heart, the amalgam of Square and Disney wrapped in a beautiful and captivating story. On the Disney side, you'll slide through the trees with Tarzan and stand trial before The Queen of Hearts. Besides mainstay party members Donald and Goofy, all totaled you'll interact with over 100 Disney characters, ranging from Jafar from Disney's *Aladdin* to Jack Skellington from *Tim Burton's the Nightmare Before Christmas*. It's not like reliving your childhood memories; it's like acting them out, a truly spectacular sensation. On the Square side, cameos from Yuffie, Cloud, Cid, Tidus, Wakka, Selphie, and Moogle resonate on a completely new and different level because of the content, creating a sense of both absurdity and almost unequaled fantasy.

Kingdom Hearts may not be the apex of action and adventure, but it certainly is very good on that level. It shines most brightly where it intends to, and really needs to, uniting America's king of animated entertainment with Japan's king of role-playing epics, a pairing which is possibly the most significant collaboration of creative bodies of our time, and hopefully a sign of things to come in the ever-maturing world of videogames.
play



Goofy and Donald look in need of a spot of the ol' heaing potion

"*Kingdom Hearts* shines most brightly where it intends to, uniting America's king of animated entertainment with Japan's king of role-playing epics."

kingdom hearts — **play** rating

PS2 — developer: **square** / publisher: **square ea** / available: **september**

To say that *Kingdom Hearts* is magical is an understatement. As cinematic experiences go, it's exquisite. It's not the finest in terms of action, but overall, it's wonderful.

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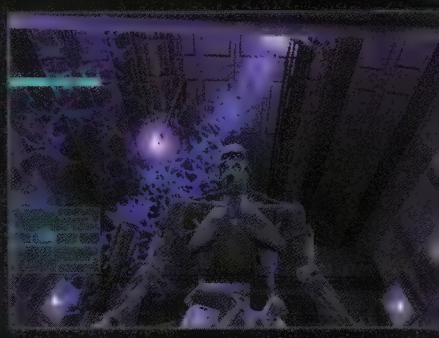
MACHINE HEADS

Feel like blasting the crap out of a race of machines bent on annihilating the human race? I thought so.

words dave halverson



Kills robots dead, and they don't come back

James Cameron may have done too great a job, sculpting the first two installments in the *Terminator* film franchise so masterfully, the bar was raised so high no director could ever reach it, let alone do a chin-up. The movies have become a sort of right of passage; show me a guy who doesn't react to the command "your clothes" (it's un-cool now to say, "I'll be back") and I'll show you the last living brain donor. Who didn't shed a tear when Arnold's thumb reached for the sky as he sank into the fiery ooze? C'mon, you know you did, but that was a man-style cry, a cry to be proud of. The same, however, cannot be said for the *Terminator* game franchise, where we weep instead because besides Virgin's 16-bit Genesis and Sega CD side scrollers, the brand has been deader than a Kentucky Fried Chicken. Ripe for initiation into the 128-bit boys club, Paradigm Studios (*Pilotwings, Beetle Adventure Racing*) has given it a go and come up with a game that is worthy to lead the charge but in no way perfect.

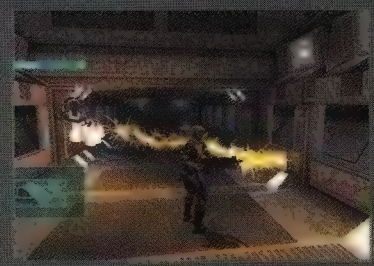
Set before the first film in 2027, the last bastion of humanity is fighting for survival of the species, against Skynet and their deadly Terminator robots. The resistance—Tech Com, lead by John Connor—has begun to erode the machine's dominance, so they plan to send a Terminator back in time to kill John's mother before he's born... and you know the rest. Learning of this plan, Connor plans a counterattack, and it's time to go to work. Your job is to fight your way to Skynet's time-travel facility and send Kyle Reese on his way to being seen naked in theatres across the country. Don't feel bad though, he gets to score with a rippled Sarah Connor before he buys it.

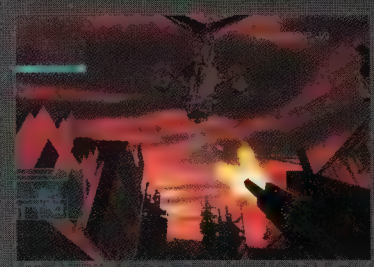
On your way to victory you'll play as Reese, hardened soldier, father to John; Catherine Luna, a hotty from Special Ops; and Captain Justin Perry, a Howie Long-type veteran covered in tattoos that assure him a spot on the WWF should humanity prevail, provided a McMahon has survived—or I suppose they could just thaw one by then...

The technology employed in the game is solid enough—settings look gritty, post-war apocalyptic—and the models are good, but make no mistake: *Dawn of Fate* was born and bred for the PS2. Textures are smooth (no "baked-in" or bump-mapping effects) and the environments can't be manipulated, which results in the game's only fatal flaw, a *Blue Stinger*-style camera. Negotiating your character from place to place as the perspectives change has a tendency to throw (and turn) you off. Perspective problems can wreak havoc on a game's flow. This is an older glitch, inherent of early 3D (Dreamcast, PS) that I believed we were well beyond in modern game design, but I suppose *Dawn of Fate* must have started development on an older engine some years ago. Either that or it's just a poor decision, because otherwise, the game delivers. The missions are scripted and balanced for maximum immersion, the weaponry and different types of Skynet assassins are super cool, and the music re-creates the ominous, epic feel of the films.

"Paradigm Studios has given the *Terminator* series a go and come up with a game that is worthy but in no way perfect."

If you're a fan of mission-based action, and this series in particular, it's well worth coming to grips with the camera to thunk some R-6 charges into hordes of ekto nastiness; otherwise, holster that credit card and wait for the sequel. **play**





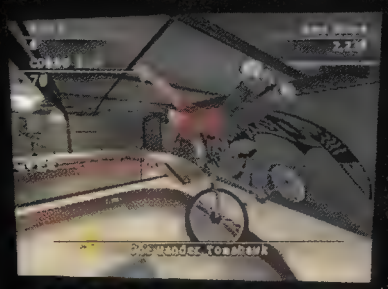
terminator: dawn of fate

XB PS2 developer: **paradigm studios** / publisher: **infogrames** / available: **now**

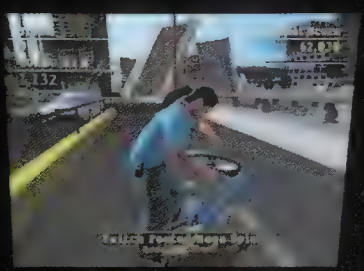
play rating

Save for the perspective glitches indicative of an older engine, *Dawn of Fate* delivers a fitting game based on the resilient *Terminator* franchise.

10 WORLD VERT TITLES. 1 EPIC ROAD TRIP.



Crank out huge airs like 10-time World Vert Champ Mat Hoffman.



The only BMX game to offer flatland tricks.

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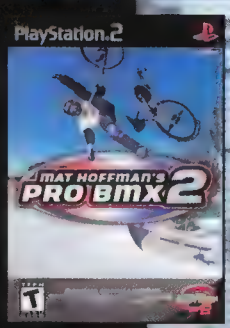
MAT HOFFMAN'S PRO BMX 2



Force your opponent off the screen in the 02 exclusive PUSH mode.

PRODUCTS RANGE FROM EVERYONE TO TEEN
E-T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

PlayStation.2 XBOX GAMECUBE GAME BOY ADVANCE rainbow studios

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ACTIVISION O2

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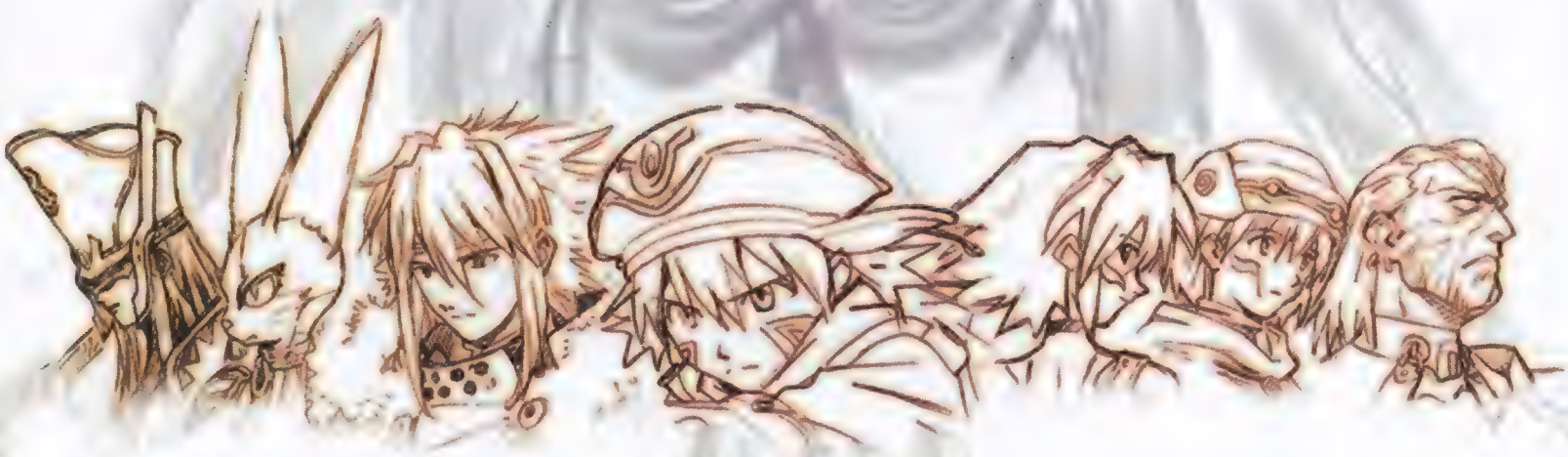
.hack 感染拡大

.hack 悪性変異

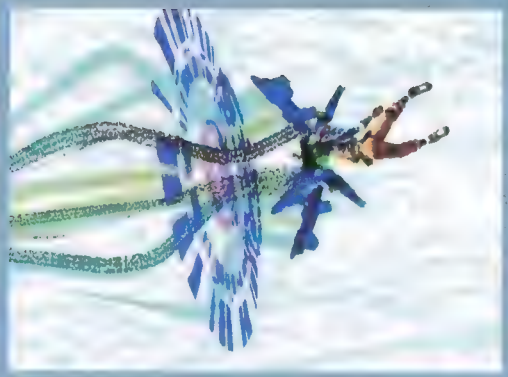
.hack 侵食汚染

.hack 絶対包囲



NET PLAY

words dave halverson



Imagine a simulation of the experience of partaking in an online "world"-type game, not unlike *Everquest* (only with better character design) from a real-world vantage point, and Bandai's intriguing *dotHack* will begin to come into focus. You are the user and play as a character in "The World," the on-line sensation that has swept across Japan (in the game), selling 20 million copies. You begin *dotHack* by signing in and logging on and then, once you've read the requisite prompts from your desktop (complete with news, mail, posts, etc.), dive into The World with an on-line pal, just as you would in real life. Problem is, when your friend's character in The World, Orca, is struck down by a mysterious force in the game, he falls into a coma in the real world. Once you log off, your email beckons—he's in the hospital and no visitors are allowed. Your posts on the net, telling of what happened and asking if it's happened elsewhere, are quickly and mysteriously deleted as a strange garbled email comes through behind a ghost-like figure barely distinguishable by her noise-covered jpeg image.

Whether you call it *Lawnmower Man*-meets-anime or an extension of *Existenz*, there's no denying this is a game idea ripe for the picking. However, to pull off such a game requires one very big caveat: you absolutely have to design a compelling universe filled with compelling characters, and here's where Bandai has a leg-up. This game is based on the hot-in-Japan anime of the same name, so it not only has both of those, but a real-world tie-in, making it the first-ever brand of its kind. Instead of "play the game see the movie," it's "live the game, gain insight from the TV series." How completely amazing is that?

Don't expect to jump right in, form a massive party, and start chopping down monsters. Like any real net game, once in The World you're treated as a "Newbie." You know few people, have little to trade and are a level-one weakling. Only through diligent and smart dungeon clearing, and key purchases and trades, will you slowly immerse your very special character in the game. Chatting with other players, you discover keywords like "Detestable Golden Sunny Demon" that act as links to different worlds. Once in these worlds, you'll cross the plains and ascend into vast dungeons where you'll fight *PSO*-style with your party, using Bandai's ingenious menu system to assign, access, heal, and attack. Jumping out of the net or "Logging Off," new mail and posts lead you deeper and deeper down the rabbit hole. Before you know it, you feel like you're really on the net, playing a game with real people, attempting to unravel a scheme of biblical proportions. This game is something else. It's a bit of a shame that the developers don't have a grasp on the PS2's newer tool sets, allowing vast environments with infinite lines of site, but it's an intriguing world nevertheless. Areas on the world maps fade into view, *Dark Cloud*-style, using the old blurring techniques so inherent in Japan-developed games from the system's early days. This is a minute flaw, though, as the game's innards and towns appear quite stunning, especially as you begin to assail the higher levels of the game. Most importantly, the character models are gorgeous, anime-inspired beauties, with the women especially nimble and well-shapen, and the music is made to imbue the player with a sense of the environments.

dotHack is a game that belongs in any anime fan's PS2 the day it comes out—don't think twice, just rush out and buy it immediately—but it should also appeal to the masses, especially people who like the idea of virtual worlds but either don't have the means or inclination to "log-on" in real life (creeped-out, no doubt, by interacting with Lord knows who in the real world, while pondering that the sexy beast in your head may be a 300-pound slobbering Dorito muncher). Not that I have anything against them—Doritos I mean. That's a joke, people. *dotHack* is requisite playing. Play the game, watch the anime, and experience something completely new and original on your home console.

"You see like you're really on the real thing."

.hack//SIGN anime

After indulging in the virtual landscape inside the game, prepare yourself for '03's first big anime event, .hack//Sign. We're not sure how the two will coexist or where Bandai will take the project from here, nevertheless intriguing prospects lie ahead for this incredibly original new slice of media...

.hack

PS2

developer: bandai / publisher: bandai / available: september

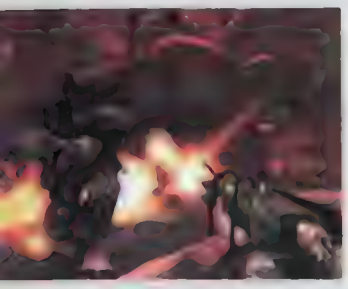
play rating

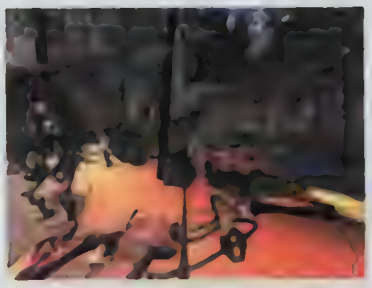
Something new and original is afoot, anime inspired, and tailor made to melt away the days. *dotHack* is not to be missed.

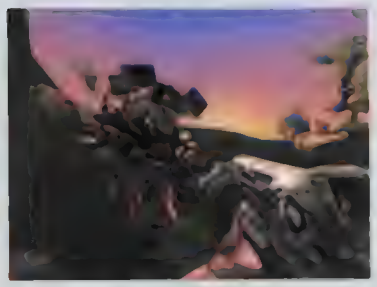
UWANTUROK

Prepare for one m[illegible]y intense ride in the latest and greatest Turok.

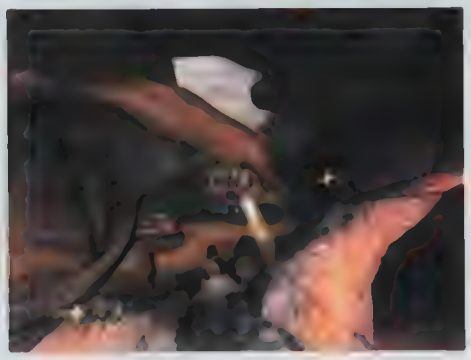
words brady fiechter







When these beasts drop, don't



Assembled with a comic-book flair from many of the best parts of the first three *Turok* games, this enormous first-person shooter gathers steam quick and early, ratcheting up the intensity at a fever pitch. It's been too long since I've played an FPS that contains this much engaging challenge and fierce energy; *Turok: Evolution* is not for the uninitiated.

Wisely returning to its prehistoric roots, *Turok: Evolution* recalls the first game's unique, organic, adventurous world of antiquated structures and serpentine caves, mountain paths and roaming dinosaurs, armed beasts and quick-moving alien-lizard freaks. Now that we're several years past that once-joyous N64 technology, the new beasts on the block sport screen-filling girth and bone-shattering power with big-ass weapons. Part of what makes *Turok* especially effective is the infrequency of the most intimidating foes, giving them a greater sense of threat and impact.

Which is not to say they're any more ruthless than the snipers who love to hide on bridges and in shadowy towers. The levels are so skillfully constructed, with object placement and structure design handled so adroitly, that even the weaker moments of enemy incompetence don't compromise the pull of the experience; I could not get enough of simply running and gunning, blasting waves of ridiculously aggressive resistance. But let your guard down, forget about the dire need to wait and study each situation, and you're a pile of death. The balance of manic, claustrophobic combat and aggressive run-and-gun shootouts is another part of *Evolution*'s hook.

The game is not a technical marvel, but this enormous alien world you tear apart is strongly appealing in the way it is presented and populated. Cool touches abound: the enemy vomits from a poisonous arrow, throws its hands up in surrender (don't you dare neglect sending a bullet to end it for good), collapses deliciously from a decapitation. An adventure-angled, old-school approach to design gives the game a graphic, outrageous edge without being heavy-handed, and every time a body part explodes or another giant comes rumbling around the corner, it's as entertaining as the first encounter. And I like the way the enemy gathers and moves in the complex level, attacking from all sides, positioned in the most deadly of spots. Total awareness of the surroundings is crucial to progression.

What I don't like are the cheap kills from traps and falls that guarantee death for their discovery, sending you far back to begin again, and the unnecessary, thankfully limited, flying levels, where you ride an armed pterodactyl who is in need of better control and animation. It also would benefit from a few extra details, but no matter. *Evolution* is such a kick to play that you disregard the bumps and enjoy the intense ride. **play**

"It's been too long since I've played an FPS that contains this much engaging challenge and fierce energy."

turok: evolution — play rating

PS2 XB GC

developer: acclaim studios austin / publisher: acclaim / available: september

To get the most out of the *Turok* experience, don't hesitate to go with the superior GameCube version.

SMASHING!

The last thing to go through your mind will be your ass.

BURNOUT 2™
POINT OF IMPACT

HEART RACING. POLICE SIREN FLASHING BEHIND YOU. HANDS CLENCHING THE WHEEL AS YOU MANEUVER THROUGH THE MOST REALISTIC TRAFFIC SCENARIOS EVER DEVELOPED. EYES WATERING AS YOU WITNESS THE MOST REALISTIC AND HORRIFIC CRASHES EVER SEEN IN A GAME. MUSCLES TENSING AS YOU TRY TO MAINTAIN CONTROL THROUGH 30 OPEN ROAD STAGES. YOU'VE PICKED YOUR CAR FROM AN AUTOMOTIVE ARSENAL OF 14 ALL-NEW VEHICLES. HOPEFULLY, CAR AND DRIVER WILL SURVIVE THE POINT OF IMPACT. OR THE LAST THING TO GO THROUGH YOUR MIND WILL BE YOUR ASS.

EVERYONE
E
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Mild Violence

Criterion

PlayStation 2

Acclaim
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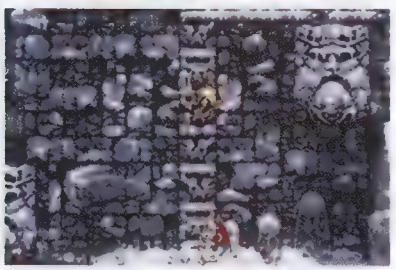
SEQUEL QUEEN

Had enough Lara yet? Well, have some more!

words dave halverson



Guess what Lara does in this game...Can you, huh?

"All of the trademark *Tomb Raider* elements are here, more akin to the early PS versions than the Game Boy Color games..."

Hard to believe the queen of sequels is already making her third appearance on the small screen. In this, her first on GBA, Lara gets yet another overhaul in *Lara Croft Tomb Raider: The Prophecy*, adopting a quasi-3D framework to house her usual dose of adventuring, shooting, jumping, hiking, and throwing lots and lots of switches. Somehow, Lara always seems to wind up in places with lots of dogs and doors with peculiar means of opening, but this time, she's going up. The *Prophecy* is like the wedding cake of *Tomb Raider* games: instead of traveling deep into or across the terrain, Lara goes vert, climbing, jumping and shooting her way through an all-new original story just for the GBA. The game's designers make the most of the fixed-camera perspective, endowing Lara with great animation and a real-time shadow, to match the dynamic lighting system and transparencies featured in the levels. All of the trademark *Tomb Raider* elements are in here, more akin to the early PS versions than the Game Boy Color games and their annoying bugs (insects). Core is obviously going for a grown-up, hand-drawn version of *Tomb Raider*, twin pistols, side-to-side jumps, leaps of faith, ledges, ladders, and all. Early warning signs, however, come in the form of repetition, way, way too many dogs in the levels (it's like Lara vs. the German shepherds right now, and I like German shepherds), and our preview cart had an annoying bongo boogie playing over every level that had me chanting like Gandhi. Once these kinks are ironed out, if they're ironed out, this could rank as one of the very best GBA games of the year...if. **play**

lara croft tomb raider: the prophecy

GBA

animal crossing

play rating ●●●●●

GC

developer: nintendo
publisher: nintendo
available: now

Certainly not for everyone, this "life simulator" seems tailor made for the younger set. You can't lose or die in the game. You simply inhabit a little world of animals and tasks, living out a little life—earn money to fix up your pad (or buy a bigger one), catch bugs and fish, and basically overdose on pleasantness.

This is the game at its most basic and admittedly addictive level. Where it gets really interesting, however, is in its interaction with the Game Boy Advance and other players. With the GBA link, you can visit new lands and even download NES games tucked away here and there in the game world. Through Memory Cards, you can visit other players' towns, bringing the little virtual world to life in surprising ways. **Michael Hobbs**

ferrari f355 challenge

play rating ●●●●●

PS2

developer: sega am2
publisher: sega
available: now

On the surface, Yu Suzuki's *Ferrari F355 Challenge* seems like a rather low-value game. Compared to the likes of *Gran Turismo 3*, *Ferrari F355* offers just *one* car to choose from and a deeply straightforward game structure.

If all you're interested in is surface, then avoid this game. But for the avid driving fan, *Ferrari F355* represents something of an ultimate experience.

Basically a port of the awesome Dreamcast game (with a few new courses like Fiorano), *Ferrari F355* captures the feeling of driving a car like no other racing game on the planet. The physics model is so highly developed and tuned that it actually makes this bare-bones game very engaging. It's not easy, but it's worth it. Please use the Logitech GT Force wheel for best results. **Michael Hobbs**

dynasty warriors 3

play rating ●●●●●

XB

developer: koei omega force
publisher: koei
available: now

Koei's killer action game has made the leap from PS2 to Xbox, losing nothing in the translation. Being a port, it also didn't gain much, but no matter, this is the kind of action game that we haven't seen much of on Xbox.

Taking its cue from Chinese history, *Dynasty Warriors 3* is an all-out action exercise as you (or you and friend) mow down wave after wave of attacking hordes, unleashing swirling combos, devastating team attacks, and just general mayhem. There is fog galore in the backgrounds, but that is more than compensated for by the staggering number of characters on screen. Sure the A.I. is basic, but the action is so smooth and flowing, you'll enjoy your first kill as much as the 500th.

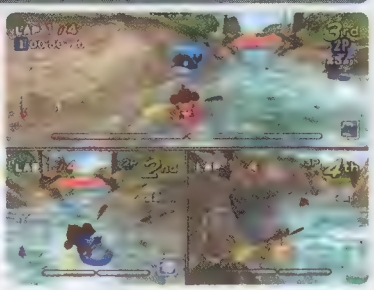
Michael Hobbs

super monkey ball 2

play rating ●●●●●

GC

developer: sega amusement vision
publisher: sega
available: now



Those spherically challenged simians are back and better than ever. *Super Monkey Ball 2* picks up right where the last game left off, and it has been improved in every way.

For those unfamiliar, *SMB* is an action-puzzle game in which you endeavor to guide a monkey in a ball to a goal. Sounds simple, but it quickly becomes devilishly difficult as the level complexity and activity increases to the point where each trial becomes a super-human trial of skill and patience.

For the sequel, Amusement Vision has really upped the creativity with brilliant new levels, greatly improved graphics, loads more multiplayer modes, and an easier-to-swallow structure, which makes progressing through the levels much more satisfying.

Michael Hobbs

mystic heroes

play rating

GC

developer: koei
publisher: koei
available: now

Let's face it, quality third-party games are in disgustingly short supply for the GameCube. Ninety-nine percent of the time, it's the last stop for titles clearly designed for optimum performance on the PS2 and Xbox; not the case with Koei's *Mystic Heroes*, in fact, it's just the opposite. One thing about Koei, they never produce junk or cut corners, always bringing their best to the table. Doing so on the 'Cube with a fresh, frantic, effects-filled action adventure they've clearly risen to the top of the heap in the category, presenting a game with gorgeous models, intense combos, magic-driven action, and a cast of characters that make character selection a really tough decision. GC owners with a penchant for action, look no further.

Dave Halverson

need for speed hot pursuit 2

play rating

XB PS2

developer: ea
publisher: ea
available: now

Okay, right off the bat, EA injected *Rush* into the *NFS: HP2* soundtrack, and it's about time. It's "Vapor Trails" sans lyrics, but what-the-hey, it's Rush in a videogame, finally! And what better place than a racing game that literally burns with intensity? The visuals at work here are arguably the best ever in high- speed, open-highway gameplay, especially considering the self- induced slow motion and course study, which is wicked cool. The Five-0 are simply nuts, and worse yet, they're organized. *HP2* is a game where going completely mental on the highway piloting some of the sweetest cars in existence is not only key, but palm-sweating fun that's impossible to put down. *Burnout 2* has its work cut out.

Dave Halverson

crash bandicoot: the wrath of cortex

play rating

GC

developer: eurocom
publisher: universal interactive
available: now

Ahh man, what happened here? Once again, the GameCube waits the longest and then gets the worst version of the game. *Wrath of Cortex* on the 'Cube is a HUGE disappointment. The game is missing almost all of the cool effects that made the Xbox and PS2 games come to life (prism effects and transparency are actually filled in, ouch) and there's added slow-down...more pain. This truly is a shell of the other two console versions, so I beg you to pass. The GameCube would be far, far better off without letting games like this through at all. I mean, why give your users less than your competition offers? A shame, and a sham.

Dave Halverson

nascar thunder 2003

play rating

PS2 XB GC PC

I'm going to come right out and say it: *NASCAR Thunder 2003* is the finest NASCAR game ever developed for the PS2, Xbox, GameCube and PC—three-wide, real life. Having no idea the fascination of driving in a circle, weaving through a pack of cars, I kept an open mind playing *NASCAR '03* and found that the game is actually packed with nuances that, for aspiring fans and drivers must really float their Skoal. Drafting, line selection, pitting...this is a great simulation covering 20 seasons. Not for me, but if you enjoy sitting on top of an RV eating KFC and watching cars zoom by, you've arrived!

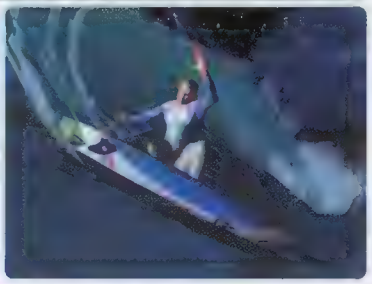
Dave Halverson

kelly slater's pro surfing

play rating ●●●●●

PS2 XB GC

developer: treyarch
publisher: activision
available: now



As surfing games go, and until now they pretty much haven't, *Kelly Slater's Pro Surfing* finally sets the standard...an actual standard! The game boasts free-surf and career play, tethered to a surfer barge that the contestants use to scope out the sweet spots (and likely toast fatties all day long). Cool words from the man himself adorn each locale—like, dude, it's breakin', let's go— and even pioneering female pro Lisa Anderson gets into the action. The replays are totally interactive, the camera can be set just about anywhere, and the control is so easily grasped, you'll be busting out moves that would take you a lifetime to learn. The grooves are even smooth with acts like Grey Boy and Thunderball replacing the usual punk drivel.

Dave Halverson

matt hoffman's pro bmx 2

play rating ●●●●●

PS2 XB GC

developer: rainbow studios
publisher: acclaim
available: now

Rainbow Studios making a BMX game is like Paul Verhoven directing a musical. Hey, wait a minute... But if you're down for yet another BMXer, *Hoffman 3* is without a doubt the best it gets. The "road" aspect of the game (presented with cut scenes worth the price of the disc) serves as a catalyst for some truly seamless locales powered by, far and away, the best camera of its kind. Vertigo sufferers beware, this is as much like being on the bike as it gets. That aside, thrashing tuneage, mad air, and the usual to-do lists beckon, with enough riders, male and female, to fill a few buckets with scabs.

Dave Halverson

tekken 4

play rating ●●●●●

PS2

developer: namco
publisher: namco
available: now

Tekken 4 is one of the most refined, visually exciting, deeply playable fighting games out there. It is the best in the series, a tight sequel that mixes up the gameplay, presentation and design aesthetics just enough to draw in the zealots yet again. No fighting game sparks with this kind of stylistic energy; the opening sequence alone boils your adrenaline and screams the distinct *Tekken* flavor, unleashing the stylized energy through to the final battle with a very gray Heihachi.

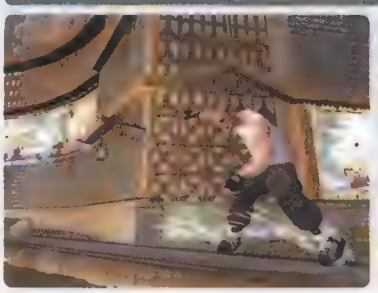
The game itself is also showing slight strain: still not a lot of freedom of movement, laden character action that requires a more preprogrammed approach to combat, arenas that still feel dislocated from the fighting. Credit is due for the newly interactive walls and objects, which frees the combo system for more exciting reversals and counters. And the game of course looks and sounds great; it is Tekken, after all.

Brady Fiechter

aggressive inline

play rating ●●●●●

PS2 XB GC



Aggressive Inline dishes out some truly inventive (if not a tad insane) level design, tight gameplay, and great visuals, to the extent that anyone even remotely interested in the sport will likely embrace this game's spin on the whole extreme sports trend. The rest of us will just have to pray that someday soon, arena-based extreme sports games will drop off the face of the Earth along with boy bands.

Seriously, I just can't play another, jelly breasts and all (speaking of that: my God, do these women have 10 kids or what; get some surgery); I believe I've had my fill. If you are so inclined, however, this is good stuff.

Dave Halverson

advance notice

duke nukem advance

play rating

GBA

developer: torus games
publisher: take 2
available: now

Think you've played a descent old-school FPS on your Game Boy Advance? Well, so did I, until I slapped *Duke Nukem* into my slot...cartridge slot, potty mouth. What makes it so much better? Well, besides everything—less pixellization, better control, smoother animation, better art, and lots of aliens and pigs in uniform to turn into mounds of bloody pork. This is an all-new Duke adventure, teen-rated and designed specifically for the Advance—says so, right in the title. *DNA* also has a four-player link mode, if you happen to have four friends with GBAs, a link cable, and this game. By the way, if you do, please, tell us. We really wonder about these things.

Dave Halverson

the mummy

play rating

GBA

developer: ubi soft milan
publisher: ubi soft
available: now

The Mummy for GBA is thankfully based on the animated series rather than the effects laden, due-for-embalming film franchise. Coming out of Ubi Soft's Milan Studios, home of *Disney's PK*, the game is presented in the GBA's now-familiar action-RPG style (*Harry Potter, Scooby Doo*). *The Mummy* has big-game production values, fluid animation, plenty of nice effects, and a somewhat intriguing character swapping feature that allows you to use the right character for the job at the flick of a trigger, toggling between the O'Connel family, with Dad for strength, Mum for dexterity, and little Alex for magic.

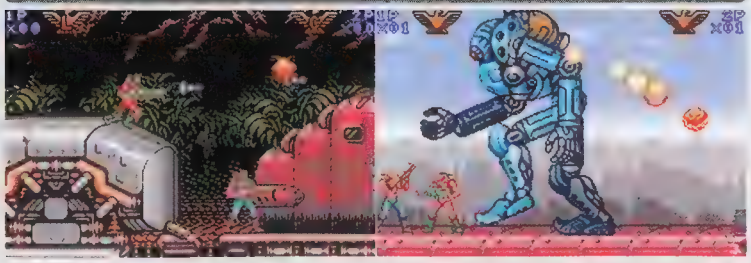
Dave Halverson

contra advance

play rating

GBA

developer: konami
publisher: konami
available: now



Isn't this one of the greatest reasons to own a Game Boy Advance? Perfect ports of SNES classics continue to filter through, reminding us all of the very high level of design skill that epitomized the best 2D games.

Contra of course needs no introduction, especially this one, the hard-as-nails port of the SNES' *Contra III*. As expected, it plays and looks great on the GBA, only giving up a bit of res due to the LCD screen.

Best of all, the two-player mode remains intact using the GBA link feature, bringing back all the fun of trying to live through this game with an equally skilled partner.

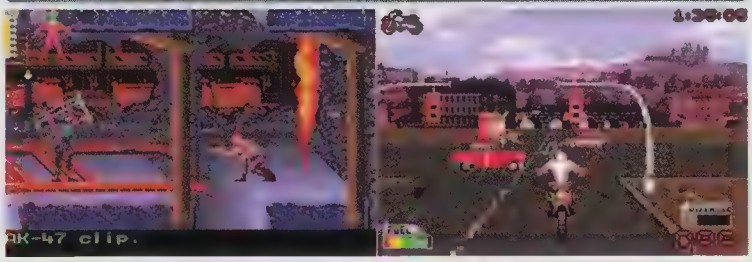
Michael Hobbs

xXx

play rating

GBA

developer: digital eclipse
publisher: activision
available: now



Someone said garden-variety-action game and as usual, Digital Eclipse came running. Seriously, these people must make a game a month. *xXx* is so cookie-cutter action, it's actually sad. The character animation is decent but oh-so-limited and the backgrounds repeat so much it's scary. The 3D stages aren't bad, if only the roads were wider and the gameplay a little better fleshed out. But the 2D portions are just total crap; you need a blue key card, you need a red key card... Go shoot the same dog and thugs a hundred times, and then return. Big-budget movie, tiny little crap game. Vin deserves better. Arnie never got games this bad; *Terminator* rocked on 16-bit!

Dave Halverson

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play anime

mireille bouquet / **noir**

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DIVINE INTERVENTION

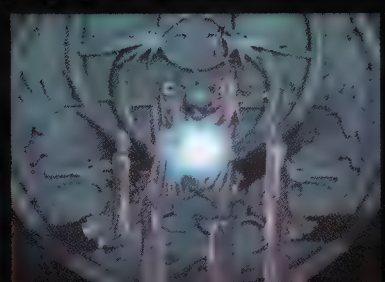
The battle for humanity's survival has begun... and the odds are not in our favor.

words dave halvenoff

"The most beautiful TV anime I have ever seen."

Two types of people will come to X: those looking for more than the film (a brief glimpse of these events) offered, and those who haven't seen it at all. Both will walk away fulfilled, although one perhaps more so than the other. X is the story of the end of the world, or so we are lead to believe, as foretold by a dreamseer princess who is never mistaken, although a shadow of doubt is cast early on in episode zero. Two sides, seven on each, the Dragons of Heaven and of Earth, with one omnipotent power known as "Kamui" for each, will decide whether humanity lives or dies. *X the Motion Picture* sought to condense these events into one somewhat confusing amalgam, concentrating mainly on the two chosen ones and their dreamseers, while only skimming the surface of 14 other players—cast members that it seems a lot of viewers really wanted to get to know; this series is their chance. The two sides, one respective of humans and the other regarding them as completely expendable, Angels and Seals, fight it out in modern-day Tokyo, each possessing amazing powers; merely thrusting down a street can cause buildings to crumble, with a single projectile blast able to topple an office tower. They look and interact with society like normal humans, but are anything but beyond the borders of reality. In order to wage their war without disturbing the present, they harness the ability to create barrier fields—one-kilometer squares of alternate universe, preventing any damage to the material plane during battle. If the creator of the barrier is defeated, however, the rules do not apply, and damage can be inflicted, a detail that will obviously affect the story as the series progresses. These first four episodes serve to set the stage as "Kamui," the one thought to be Earth's destructor, returns to Tokyo triggering a chain of events as the chosen begin to assemble. Those who have seen the movie also get to witness the birth of a very familiar sword, one of the most telling scenes of the first volume.

What's most striking about *X* is that, for a TV series, it looks like anything but. The animation and backgrounds are beautiful throughout, with every scene painstakingly detailed and uniform characters shot for shot—a rarity in series anime. In fact, this is the most beautiful TV anime I have ever seen—hand's down. Clamp is obviously still in love with these characters, and that respect emanates on the screen. Clamp being to anime what Square is to role-playing, you pay the same, but get so much more. The score is also fittingly epic, digging down deep right from the beginning, drawing you into the drama unfolding onscreen. *X* has shades of *The Omen* and *The Matrix* along with a mystical quality that blends seamlessly with reality, resulting in something altogether extraordinary. I am humbled by it yet again.



X [one] vol.1

play rating

studio: pioneer / rating: 16 up / running time: 95 min.

The series event of the year, *X* is exquisite in every way—story, character design, and soundtrack.

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ZERO TO HERO

Anime's answer to *Star Trek* spins its yet another chapter...

words dave haiverson

How'd you like to be the poor sap the federation sends out to take down Space Pirate Harlock? Obviously considered expendable at this juncture of his career, the wounded duck, once Kirk-like Commander Warrius Zero is granted his old ship and a new crew (after losing his family in the war against the machines) to head into deep space and take down the unholiest of space pirates, one Harlock, his ex-best pal. Along the way, the biggest battles he faces come as a result of his half-robot, half-human crew. Segregation is not an option and the two sides, recently mortal enemies locked in war, don't exactly see eye to eyepatch. Throw a blue-haired shapely female first-mate in to the mix as their superior, and you've got spontaneous combustion. The *Star Trek*-like crew scenarios are interrupted only to bang you Zero's because scared of confrontation. The Commander is forgiving to a fault, often placing himself and his crew in harm's way due to his less-than-healthy mental state. Cosmo's a real mess (at least initially) even though he's got a massive battle cruiser, and one serious mission op on his hands, thusly creating the show's mild peril. In the tradition of Leiji Matsumoto (*Galaxy Express 999*, *Queen Emeraldas*, *The Harlock Saga*), *Cosmo Warrior Zero* looks weird (the contrast as usual between his squatty mongoloid and lean elegant types fascinates) is cameo-packed, and although not what I'd call cutting edge for having a 2000 inception date, on par with the mid-range in the series, in terms of animation and clarity.

"Cosmo's a real mess even though he's got a massive battle cruiser."

Cosmo Warrior Zero

studio: anime works/ rating: 13 up / running time: 100 minutes

play rating

One of the best Matsumoto series in recent memory, Cosmo's quirky but cool.

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SMASHING DRIVE

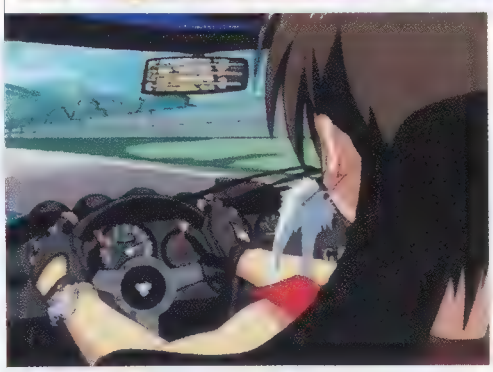
One of the year's very best new OVAs gets underway with a revved-up first volume.

words dave halverson

The more you watch anime, the more you come to appreciate new techniques and original storylines, both of which are presented skillfully in *eX Driver*. Seeing as how ultimately we are heading in the direction of automated automobiles and controlled highways (it's either that or rot in traffic and choke to death), this high speed actioner couldn't be more timely. The artists behind the creation of both the futuristic designs and the conventional tuner cars piloted by the eX Drivers, Lorna, Lisa, and Saki, employ unheard of techniques given their budget. The result is animation that looks better than similar high-dollar productions. In other words, they've poured their hearts into every frame, and it really shows (especially since it's demonstrated in the disc's extras).

The eX Drivers are an elite squad of attractive high school kids (two hot girls and a boy genius, what else?) armed with mad driving skills and, of course, COM devices that prompt them to spring into action whenever AI goes bad, hitting the road to stop rogue autos. Their methods for doing so—electro-magnetic particles and sensor-blinding bullets—never fail to astound, taking the *Fast and Furious* approach to new anime-styled heights.

Volume 1: *Downshift*'s three episodes set the stage and whet our appetites for far more than the mere six-episode run can deliver so, with any luck, the *ex Driver* movie won't lag far behind.



eX Driver Downshift vol.1

play rating ●●●●●

eX Driver is the kind of series I'd like to see go on forever. The movie is next and then, who knows?

studio: anime works / rating: 13 up / running time: 90 min.

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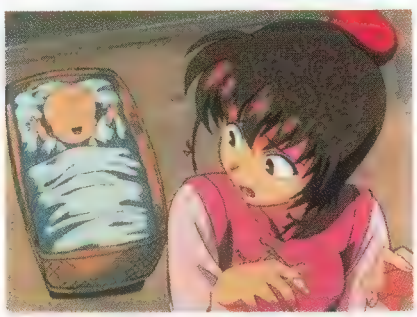
SWORDS & SAKE

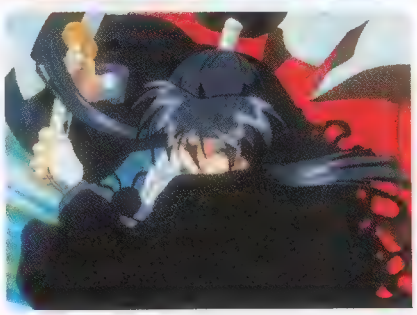
words dave halverson

As tales of wandering samurai or ronin go, I don't think I've ever seen one quite like Bandai's *Tsukikage Ran*, which may come as a surprise. Set during Japan's Edo period 1600-1868, all of the usual suspects report for duty: token bad-guys, standard issue ancient Samurai attire, a bumbling sidekick (well, that's optional) and the honor and complacency that go with holding such an esteemed title. What's unexpected is the fact that this master swordsman is a female who thinks about little else then sake—the purer the better. In fact, her very existence centers around the rice (mold, yeast, and water) elixir, to the point that if she's served a bad batch, there is hell to pay. Ran goes from town to town stopping to cure society's ills alright, but only when it serves her peculiar addiction. Otherwise she's content to just kick back and drink it all in, which would be a lot easier if the cutesy, alcoholic, dim-witted Myao (or Lady Meow of the Iron Fist Clan as they like to call her) wasn't stalking her. *Tsukikage Ran* is a parody of genre films called "Jidaigeki"—popular in Japan since the dawn of film up to present day—which traditionally (always) feature male Samurai, so a female donning the time-honored dress, Hakama pants and Haori coat, with a sake jones, well, therein lies the twist.

The show has a beautiful traditional score, and surprisingly good animation for a 13-episode TV series, complimenting the not-so-ordinary character design and comedic tone, setting Ran apart just enough from the rest of the Samurai pack.

"Ran goes from town to town stopping to cure society's ills, when it serves her addiction."





Tsukikage Ran — play rating

Tsukikage Ran is not your typical traveling Samurai tale. It combines parody, action, comedy (and, er, alcoholism) into one nicely polished package.

studio: bandai / rating: 13 up / running time: 100 minutes

THE SENSATIONAL CONCLUSION TO THE EPIC NEON GENESIS EVANGELION SAGA WILL BE TOLD IN TWO INCREDIBLE FEATURES!

"EVANGELION FANS REJOICE! THE WAIT IS OVER!" - Wizard Magazine

NEON GENESIS EVANGELION

NEON GENESIS
EVANGELION
THE END OF EVANGELION
"A VISUAL TOUR-DE-FORCE AND A MESMERIZING CLIMAX TO ONE OF THE GREATEST ANIME SERIES OF ALL TIME" - WIZARD MAGAZINE
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"THE ANIME EVENT OF A LIFETIME" - Play Magazine

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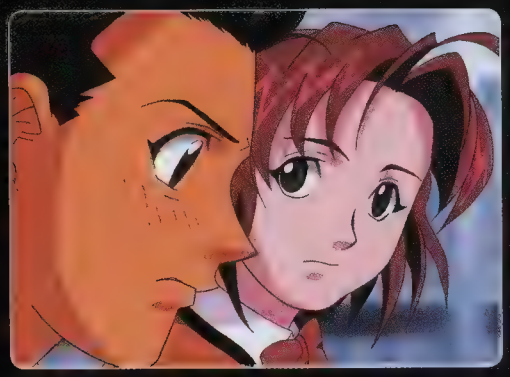
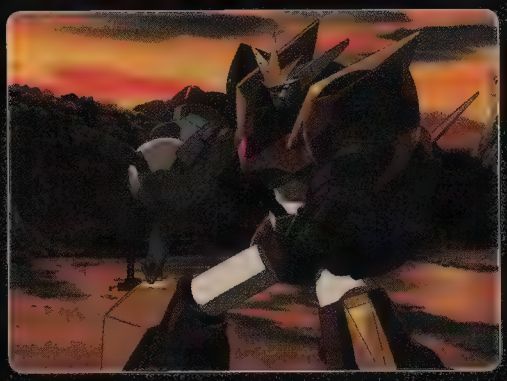
sputnik7

Dai-Guard vol.1

adv films / 125 mins. / dvd /

words dave halverson





Had enough giant robot anime yet? Is there even such a thing as enough giant robot anime? When you think about it, if not for these technological marvels, piloted by the unlikeliest of candidates, anime may have never even crossed the pond. Aside from *Kimba,* my earliest recollection of anime is *Gigantor*, and in between, there's been a constant stream covering every conceivable iteration, one of the most recent being *Better Man*, which actually manages to show some originality, as does *Dai-Guard*, surprisingly enough. For starters, the show looks fantastic, with quality animation, clean lines, detailed backgrounds and a transfer to match. So, if you've had enough of teenagers saving the world, get ready for...office workers saving the world!

Dai Guard is a giant robot that was built to pound giant invaders, called Heterodyne, into submission. Heterodyne are large geometrical alien vessels that emerge as a result of electromagnetic waves, caused by seismic activity in shifting continental plates. They range in form from cobra-like creatures to massive stadium-sized balls of fury. The problem is that, by the time Dai Guard was completed (other than the fact that, like most government contracts, its construction went to the lowest bidder), the Heterodyne attacks had stopped. So during the 12 years, Dai Guard has served as a PR attraction/mascot for the company (21st Century Defense & Security), with employees dressed in bird suits luring tourists in for the tour. When the Heterodyne attacks return, Akagi (the boy in the bird), becomes Dai Guard's pilot, much to the chagrin of the military, along with two other lackies from the office pool. Although the trio constantly save the city, rather than accolades from the executive branch, they get nothing but grief, as a result of all of the damage claims and the military breathing down their necks. Soon enough, however, the big wigs find a way to milk Dai Guard and the military want him back, creating a catch-22 of biblical proportions.

"Dai Guard is a giant robot built to pound giant invaders."

Kurogane Communication vol.1-3

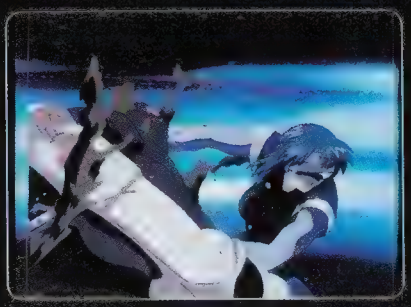
words dave halverson

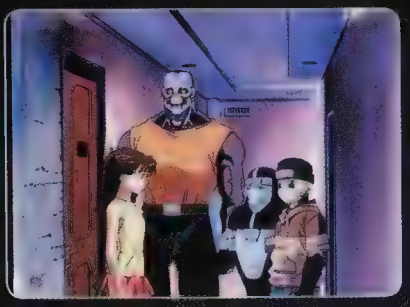
media blasters / 13 & up / 360 mins. / dvd /

There's a lot to be said for somber, understated anime rooted in science-fiction, especially seeing as how most are exactly the opposite. *Kurogane Communication* is about a little girl who's placed in a cold sleep just as the world, or humanity at least, comes to an end. When she is awakened, all that's left are the robots that served humankind, both good, and rogue security types, which left unattended, have gone berserk. The robots that take care of "Mrs. Haruka" possess a heightened artificial intelligence with the capacity to love and feel emotion, and at least until such a time she can fend for herself, their lives are dedicated to her care. As the series gets underway, her life is bittersweet; she has loving companions and a playmate that will do anything for her, but the world around her is in ruins, a quiet desolate shell of the city where she was born. She also can't remember what became of her parents or whether they might be alive. It is presumed that she is the last human being on the planet, and from this vantage point, the story slowly unfolds, captivating more often than not, right up until the surprising end.

The script in *Kurogane* is one of the most unique in recent memory, with an almost alien sense of right and wrong. Without any human influence around her and only the lessons she was taught as a child to guide her, Haruka is almost pathetically sweet and trusting. The robots programming is pure, proper and rooted in statistics, so they're little more than mecha-Dr. Phils. Watching her innocence erode, squirming as she learns lessons along the way, is a unique experience that leads to a very satisfying end, making the three volumes well worth it. Were we once so innocent? Could we ever be again? Or will it take something catastrophic for us to find our humanity. The current state of the world being what it is, Kurogane Communication hits home.

"The story slowly unfolds, captivating more often than not."





The first working mom to conquer the galaxy!
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Many war movies are fixated on violence and the horrors of combat, detailing scenes of tremendous destruction and human suffering. It's rare to receive a war film that chooses restraint over chaos, quiet consequence over explicit pain. It's rare to receive a somber gift like *Grave of the Fireflies*, one of the most powerful meditations on war I've ever seen.

Grave of the Fireflies tells a story of a brother and sister, who have been orphaned in the wake of the devastation wrought by American bombers carrying out their final sweeps of Japan in the close of World War II. Seita is a young teenage boy, forced to live beyond his years, and he shows a caring warmth towards his sister Setsuko that is heartbreaking. Their mother passes away after an air raid sprays its fiery death over the primitive neighborhood, leaving her terribly burned. She has a heart condition; when Seita discovers her, staring blankly out of a tiny opening in her bandages, he pleads for the doctor to administer her heart medication.

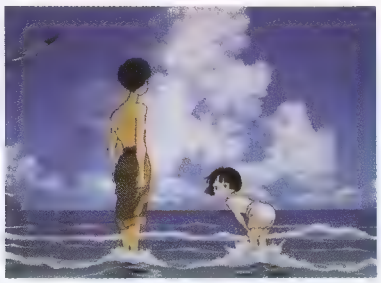
When the bombs are dropped, it's frightening to see the napalm canisters silently fall as inhabitants scramble to find shelter. Escape is often futile. Little remains of the city.

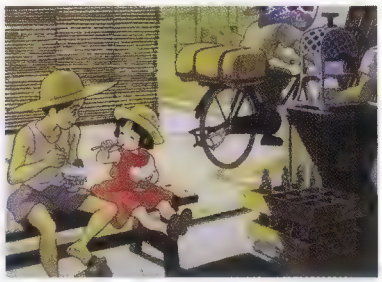
There are few scenes of graphic violence and raw energy in *Grave of the Fireflies*, allowing the film to ponder the emotional devastation and the subtle grief that crawls amongst the rubble. The pain lives in the eyes of Seita and Setsuko, the innocence and confusion of two human beings completely devastated by death yet unsure of its meaning.

Quiet moments are the film's greatest source of strength. There is a devastating scene where Seita cuddles a sack of white rice as if it were an extravagant present on Christmas day. And in a disarmingly beautiful moment, drawn with grace and extraordinary vision, the children catch fireflies for emotional release, and even nourishment; Setsuko accidently crushes one in her hand, but doesn't understand what has occurred: "It's all squishy."

The underlying story of love and survival is told with simple dialogue but tremendous emotion. The children are forced to live with their Aunt, who tears them down with her cold words and lack of caring. Eventually they move into a cave and fend for themselves. In some tragic way, they are at peace with their actions, proud of the bond they have and ability to continue life in such tragic circumstances. So much love exists between the two young lives. When tears are shed, when their admirable strength breaks, the sadness weighs heavy on our hearts. Their will to live eventually erodes into sorrow; where most animated features play for excess and bombast, *Grave of the Fireflies* reaches for a swallowing sorrow

Isao Takahata allows his images to breathe; moments of quiet observation, of nature displaying her beauty, are held with powerful care. That we feel every wave of emotion, every subtle breath, is the undertow that pulls us in to the spirit of the film. *Grave of the Fireflies* is tragic and powerful, beautiful and sad, one of the best anime you'll see this year.





Grave of the Fireflies

play rating

Grave of the Fireflies belongs on any list of the most tragic of war movies.

studio: central park media / rating: 12 up / running time: 88 minutes

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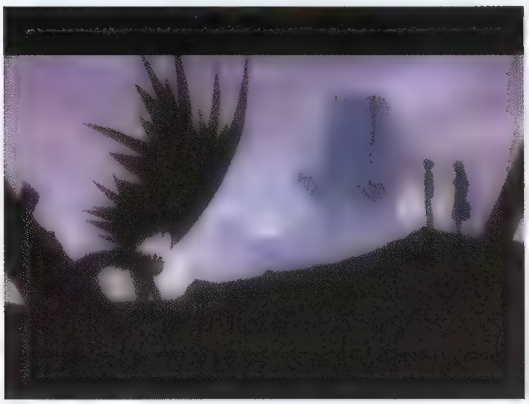
Steel Angel Kurumi vol.3

studio: adv films / rating: 17 up / running time: 90 mins.

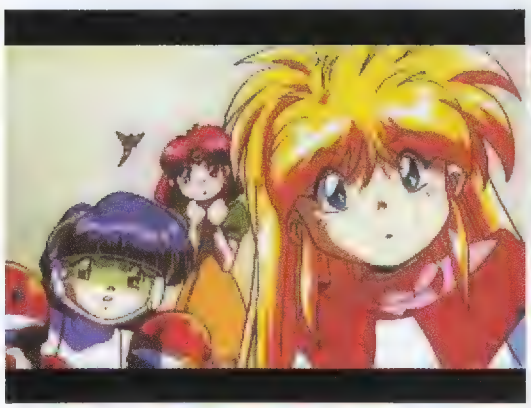
Sweet Kurumi: demon or angel? A forbidden power forces Nakahito to make a decision that takes *Steel Angel* down a much darker path, in this captivating third volume.

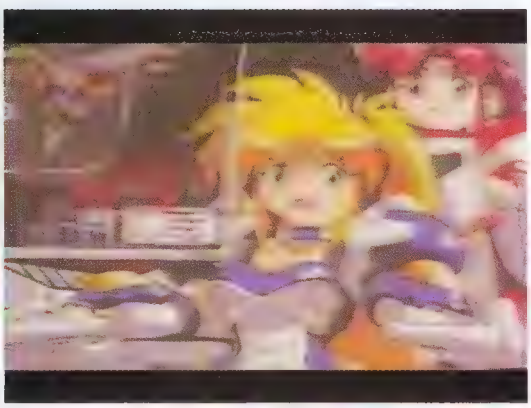


The SoulTaker vol.4

studio: pioneer / rating: 16 up / running time: 100 mins.

Incest, evil flickers, and grandpa brain? After a whole lot of psychological malarkey, *SoulTaker* ends up being the story of the world's most dysfunctional family.





Galaxy Fraulein Yuna vol.1

studio: adv films / rating: 12 up / running time: 150 mins.

She fries an egg during re-entry... and then things really get weird. Yuna's old, a bit haggard and as dumb as a rock. The poster girl for ding-bats and a true chick magnet.

Vandread: the second stage vol.1

studio: pioneer / rating: 13 up / running time: 100 mins.

Deeper plot, more character development and less slapstick: 2nd Stage is a total 180 from the first season of *Vandread*. Gonzo's latest gem is one flight everyone should board.

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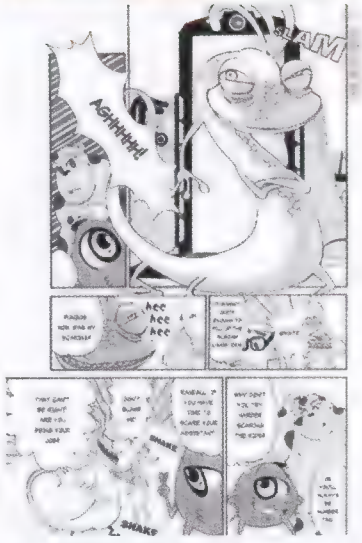
On September 20 Miyazaki's latest masterpiece, ***Spirited Away***, will see a limited release in 10 North American cities, and then on September 28 will open wide in those same locations: Boston, Chicago, LA, Minneapolis, New York, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Seattle, Toronto, and Washington DC. On October 4 the film will be released in Atlanta, Dallas, Denver, Detroit, Houston, Montreal, Phoenix, San Diego, and Vancouver marking the widest opening for a Miyazaki film to date. Early reviews have been mixed regarding *Spirited Away*'s transfer and dubbing, however, the material is said to be the best amalgam yet of the famed artisan's dark and light sides...In Manga news, TokyoPop announced recently the acquisition of the Japanese Manga based on Pixar's ***Monsters Inc.***, written by Hiromi Yamafuj. Seems an odd match, but why not? A full preview can be found at tokyopop.com. Former Square animator Fransisco Cortina (who worked on *Final Fantasy IX* and The *Spirits Within,* among others) now Senior Character Artist at Dreamworks, posted some 3D models on his website (www.digitalsculptor.net) of characters he created for *Animatrix #9*, a series of animated shorts that act as prequels to ***The Matrix***. While this work is pure CG-animation, others will be hand drawn in traditional anime style. Joel Silver has commissioned talent from across the anime spectrum to give each episode a unique texture. The first Matrix anime should arrive in the fall, and then appear on a regular basis with the 10-episode series concluding just before the release of *The Matrix Revolutions* in 2003. In Bandai news, the official website for the upcoming ***Macross Zero*** OAV has been launched at www.bandaivisual.co.jp/macrosszero. The website is in Japanese only, although you can drool over four new characters and get an idea of how the show will look. *Mobile Suit Gundam* mechanical designer Kunihiko Oogawa has designed a prototype sci-fi motor scooter built by Honda called **Zoomer**. The Zoomer isn't actually based on any manga or anime in particular, but the for-now one-of-a-kind scooter definitely exhibits Gundam mecha-style roots. The Zoomer cycle was on display at the C3 exhibition in Tokyo August 24 & 25. So far Honda has not announced plans to introduce a production model. It never hurts to email them and beg, though....In music news, Punk Band Four of Five has contributed a bonus song to TokyoPop's the ***GTO*: *Original Anime Soundtrack***. The CD features 20 tracks, including music from the hit anime series, and went on sale in August.



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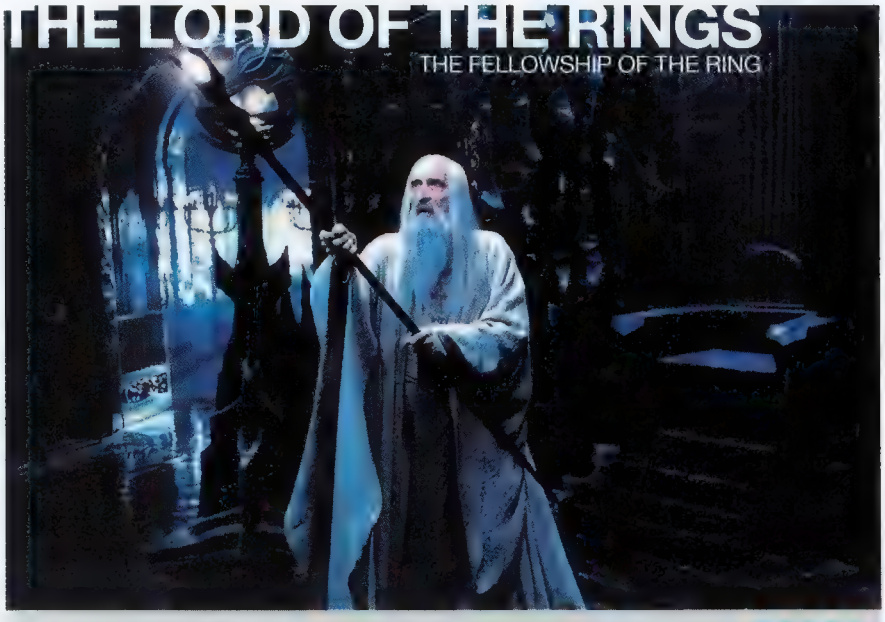
play MEDIA

THE LORD OF THE RINGS

THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING



NEW LINE CINEMA
RATEDPG-13

movie
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Every once in awhile, a movie will come out that will not only exceed your expectations, but your dreams as well. *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* is one such movie. Director Peter Jackson has managed to translate the epic tale into a wondrous, gorgeous production that brings Middle Earth to cinematic life. Fellowship is the first chapter of a series from legendary author J.R.R. Tolkien and thus more expository in presentation, revolving around Frodo Baggins (Elijah Wood) who inherits a gold ring from Bilbo Baggins (Ian Holm). Later, we find out that this band of gold is The One Ring that belonged to the Dark Lord Sauron and now Frodo must travel to the heart of Mordor and destroy it at Mount Doom. Banding together with nine adventurers, Frodo goes on a quest that will take him from his safe home in the Shire to the dangers of Middle Earth. While watching *Fellowship*, you can't help but be mesmerized by the fantastic cast and especially the breakthrough performances of Viggo Mortensen (who plays Aragorn) and Orlando Bloom (Legolas the Elf). And Ian McKellen (Gandalf) is indeed worthy of his Oscar-nominated performance. The production design in *Fellowship* is extraordinary, too. Jackson effectively utilizes the lush vistas of New Zealand to flawlessly represent otherworldly beauty of Tolkien's kingdom. Equally impressive is the set design (especially the Shire with Hobbits' homes built right into the hillsides). The goose-bump-inducing soundtrack adds to the mix, too, coupled with incredibly vibrant sound effects, truly giving Fellowship that epic feel—something that so many movies try to accomplish but only a few can attain. Purists of Tolkien criticize the film as being "too short" or "rushed." Although I can see where these nitwits base their complaints (*The Lord of the Rings* was originally one big novel, not a trilogy), but Jackson and crew have created a masterpiece that truly does the story justice. The debate also arises as to whether or not you should pick up this version of *Fellowship* or wait till November 12 for the ultra-special four-disc "Extended Edition" (which will feature 30 minutes of additional footage). My opinion: Get them both. They'll have different bonus materials and you'll have the theatrical and extended versions. Plus, you know you want it.

VALUE: In addition to a fantastic movie on disc one, the special features on disc two are also quite impressive. There are three unique presentations about *Fellowship*, including a promotional documentary from the book publishers, Houghton Mifflin entitled "Welcome to Middle Earth," a special that ran on Fox called "Quest for the Ring" and my favorite, "A Passage to Middle Earth," which premiered on the Sci-fi Channel. Other key features include 15 lordoftherings.net featurettes, three trailers and an Enya music video. But by far the coolest feature is the 11-minute behind-the-scenes preview of *The Two Towers*.

Tom Ham

THE FOG: SE

MGM
RATED R

movie
dvd

Twenty-three years after its release, I can finally watch *The Fog* without issue. You see, I was a mere 12-year-old when it was originally released and the parental units wouldn't allow it. A follow-up to his hit film, *Halloween*, master storyteller John Carpenter skillfully tells a tale of horror while barely showing anything on screen. Inspired by a trip to Stonehenge in England, *The Fog* tells of a small town on the shores of Antonio Bay that gets engulfed by an eerie, menacing fog. When mysterious figures start to appear in the darkness and townspeople start getting killed, a link to the past is the only thing that will save the town. Although the special effects are ancient when compared to present-day horror films, it was nice to see that a film this old can still manage to scare you. Combined with Carpenter's original spine-tingling score and a great cast, *The Fog* is one ghost story that should not go overlooked.

VALUE: Carpenter always manages to give a great commentary, offering insight on production, filming and the special effects used in the film. "Tales from the Mist: Inside *The Fog*," contains a wealth of information, including interviews with Carpenter, producer Debra Hill, the cinematographer and special effects folks. Other stuff: Storyboard-to-film comparison and four minutes of outtakes (watching the legendary John Houseman say "Shit!" is just priceless).

Tom Ham

THE OUTER LIMITS

MGM
NR

movie
dvd

DO NOT ATTEMPT TO ADJUST THE PICTURE. WE ARE CONTROLLING TRANSMISSION. Alright folks, now fade in cheesy sci-fi sound effects; good… good… now fade in archaic looking TV set. Cut! Welcome to *The Outer Limits: The Original Series*, the science fiction TV show that first aired in 1963, ironically just one year before *The Twilight Zone* ceased production. But where *The Twilight Zone* told stories that dealt with the human psyche and emotion (and let's face it, some of them were just plain whack), *The Outer Limits* stuck to the facts, specifically, scientific facts—their stories were not only imaginative, but utterly believable as well. All 32 episodes from the first season (over 27 hours worth of TV—a daunting task for any reviewer, if you ask me) span four discs in this massive "collector's edition" (if you can call it that). This is truly the DVD for the hardcore fan.

VALUE: Despite having every episode from the first season on four DVDs, there are no extra features to be found. That's right folks: no commentary, no documentary and no advertising materials—zilch. It would've been nice to have a CD-ROM feature or an informational insert or something! All you have are four silver discs. Plus, there isn't even any artwork on them. And to make matters worse, *The Outer Limits* official website has more stuff on it than this DVD set. For shame.

Tom Ham

NEWSBYTES

. . . ***SUPERMAN* IS STILL THE MAN:** Corona's Coming Attractions (http://www.corona.bc.ca/films) reports that *Batman vs. Superman*, the project to have been directed by Wolfgang Petersen (*The Perfect Storm*), has been temporarily set aside because a new script at Warner Bros. for the new *Superman* franchise is so good. According to the site, a new script by J.J. Abrams (*Alias*) has "knocked the socks off" Warner Bros. and that the 200-page draft has everyone confident in the project. The project's current director, McG, is currently committed to *Charlie's Angels 2: Halo* and may drop the project. Other contenders for the director's chair include David Fincher, Michael Mann, Rob Bowman, and Steven Soderbergh . . . **DID SHE SAY LEATHER PANTS?** MTV spoke with Kate Beckinsale (*Pearl Harbor*) about her role in *Underworld*, a movie about a vampire killer who falls in love with a "furry enemy." "This is not the kind of movie that I'm remotely interested in normally, but the script is amazing and the director is amazing. It's a very cool *Romeo and Juliet* set against the backdrop of vampires and werewolves," she explained. "I didn't want to read it when I was told about it. I really don't go for vampire movies. But it's more kind of like

VAN WILDER

ARTISAN
UNRATED

movie
dvd

It's difficult to be a comedy with the words "National Lampoon" stapled to your front. If you don't drip with laugh-inducing moments, you're an automatic disappointment. In the proverbial "teen" movie genre, *Van Wilder* doesn't bring much new to the table. Here we have a college setting, a boy-meets- girl premise, and a truckload of sexually related humor. Van Wilder, played by the charismatic Ryan Reynolds, has been at Coolidge College for seven years and is a campus legend for throwing superb parties, giving good advice and being an all around nice guy. Why his father-funded stay at college has been so lengthy is a mystery until school paper reporter Gwen Pearson (Tara Reid) is assigned to write a story on Wilder. This genre was probably best left untouched by *National Lampoon*, even though the humor is for the most part intact...without, of course, having any tact. The film contains the consumption of dog semen, acute, full-blown diarrhea and sexual encounters with participants of gross age differences. The MPAA didn't even touch this one.

VALUE: When in "unrated" mode, the navigational options appear on a live woman's T-shirt; so when you toggle between screens, she bares her breasts. Some outtakes and deleted scenes were enjoyable; others made my right eyebrow rise higher on my forehead.

Nick Hurwitch

QUEEN OF THE DAMNED

WARNER BROS.
RATED R

movie
dvd

Jonathan Davis scored and wrote music for Marilyn Manson, Wayne Static, and Chester Bennington, creating the soundtrack for *Queen*. Indulging in it repeatedly long before seeing the film, the only question on my mind was whether or not the movie could live up to the soundtrack, which it nearly does. Where it does fall apart—over-exposing the very vampires that wish to remain anonymous—it is almost expected. If the vampires called out by Lestat did blend in, the kids would balk. Anne Rice should always equal NC-17, avoiding the stigma altogether. We join Lestat after a long hibernation as he lay in a waking death, waiting for humanity to give him a reason to awaken. 20th century goth-rock is the pill, a place where he actually appears reserved. Lestat becomes an international sensation by revealing his damnation of vampire—either the most brilliant marketing hook ever (I love his logo) or proof that life eternal is possible, either of which today's youth would wholeheartedly embrace, present company included. Stuart Townsend plays a brilliant Lestat, without the stigma of past roles Cruise toted along, and Aaliyah plays it smooth and alluring, evil in a playful way, her beauty showing through even as she consumes a still-beating heart. Unfortunately, she is onscreen far too little, leaving us with Marguerite Moreau who seems to be playing a post.

VALUE: The disc is dripping with it. Read the box.

Dave Halverson

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

DISNEY
RATED G

movie
dvd

Beauty and the Beast is one of the last animated features done in classic Disney form—a love story, fantastical elements and memorable musical numbers with full choreography and townspeople participation. This is because it is a film that Walt Disney himself longed to make but never saw through, even though he attempted it in the '30s as well as one in the '50s. In 1991, the Disney Company finally got the project off the ground and it hasn't landed since. The film has inspired a Broadway musical and was also re-released on IMAX screens with the addition of a musical scene that never made it into the original. The original theatrical release, a "work-in-progress" version which was shown at the New York Film Festival in 1991, and the special edition (IMAX version) are all included and well worth watching.

VALUE: Disney magic truly shines with the bonus features on this disc. The amount of work that goes into animated films is far more extensive than that of an average film, but seldom do any of us get to see it (luckily, Disney catalogs the entire process on this disc—it's dripping with drawing board footage). Aside from the three separate versions of the film, there is an audio commentary and a sing-along mode, an enjoyable in-depth documentary and a few mini-games that younger generations and those of us with ADD can enjoy.

Nick Hurwitch

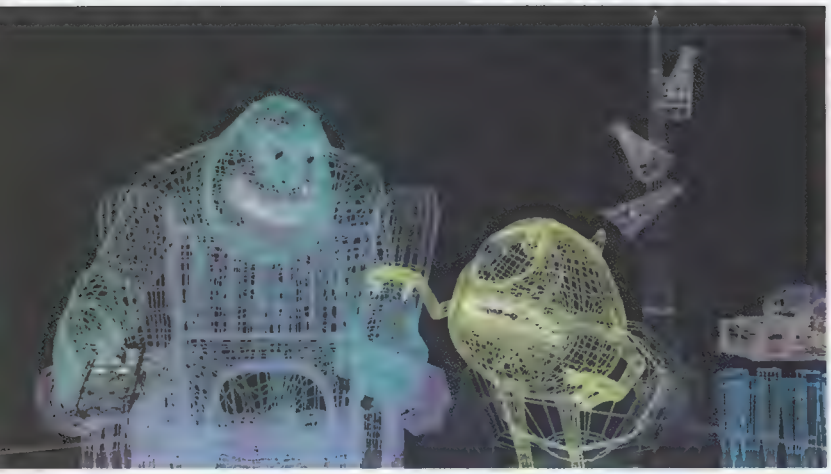
interview with the Vampire meets *The Matrix*. Lots of leather pants in it" . . . is August 2003 . . . **CARE TO TAKE KIRSTEN'S *PULSE*?** *Production Weekly* reports that Kirsten Dunst has officially committed to Wes Craven's *Pulse*. Shooting is expected to begin in October. In the film, a missing computer hacker is found dead and his young friends explore his apartment and find an odd black splotch on the wall. Analyzing the contents of a mysterious floppy disk for clues as to the reason for his suicide, the group unknowingly discovers a ghostly world. After encounters with phantoms and disembodied messages in dark, taped-up rooms and abandoned factories, only a few of the ensemble survive as the spirit world empties with apocalyptic consequences . . . **For more filmic newsbytes, direct your browser to www.cinemaconfidential.com . . .**

MONSTER'S INC.
Disney
Available Now

PUSHING PIXELS

Pixar is a place where dreams are realized... and then scripted, sketched, painted and animated. It truly is a palace of imagination.

Walking into the main entrance of their brand new animation studio—located in San Francisco's East Bay—there's no denying it. The floor stretches endlessly to all sides; it's painfully vast. Roofed by uncountable panes of glass, sunlight shoots in from all directions. At the receptionist's desk, life-size replicas of Mike and Sculley greet visitors with a wave; and straight down the center, a handful of employees wait in line at the facility's built-in cafeteria (and under Steve Job's jurisdiction, every ounce of food is healthy). Off to the right, rustling in the animation department, the co-director of *Monster's Inc.*, Lee Unkrich, is being serenaded with a rendition of "Happy Birthday." "It's one big party," boasts Bill Kinder, Senior Manager of Editorial and Post Production. "So many birthday parties, so many people, a lot of cake." That's just one of the many ways Pixar sets itself apart from the other animation houses. Upon entering, there's immediately a sense of community and unbridled fun. Even the bathrooms in the main lobby are mocked up to accentuate the [illegible] of playfulness (in the men's room an image of a silhouette of Woody appears, and on the women's side, Bo Peep). Then, without warning, a man on a scooter zooms by. Then another. "It's the only way to get around. If I had to walk, it'd be a huge waste of time," Kinder laughs. But it's true, well, if you understand the definition of "time" by Pixar standards. Rather than passing 9 hours time cards, clocking every second of an employee's work day, everyone at the facility is governed by their own will. They hustle when there's work to be done, but when a free moment presents itself, there are plenty of activities on campus. A recently installed swimming pool



is just outside, as well as a massive field (generally used for soccer or a round of catch), a basketball court, and volleyball net, and an indoor gym; and the employees are invited to weekly film screenings held in Pixar's private, state-of-the-art theater (upon our visit, *Signs* was set to screen that weekend) Everyone needs to stay energized, so no one is locked away in a cubicle. The animation department even has a flowing bar installed, complete with a grand piano, velvet walls, and other cool trinkets; and a disco ball floats above the set-up to add even more to the goofy atmosphere. The philosophy: create an environment so pleasant—so incredibly rich—that people want to be there. Ask any employee walking around and they'll instantly admit, without a second thought or stutter, that pulling through the front gate at Pixar every morning is the stuff that dreams are made of. Those dreams, though, are deeper than just an upscale, hi-tech office building. Since finishing *Toy Story* in 1995, Pixar has never had a dud in their track record—no box office losers, just blockbusters. *A Bug's Life*, *Toy Story 2* and now *Monster's Inc.* continue that legacy. It's the trophy case that *every* studio executive wish they could claim for their own."The Pixar way is perfectionism," Kinder illustrates. "It's going for every detail, making it as perfect as it can be. Aiming for that, we end up throwing away massive amounts of effort because so much of it isn't *just* quite right. That applies to the story process completely. The majority of a four-year stretch making one of these things—like *Monster's Inc.*—is spent working on the story, and storyboarding, and re-boarding, and re-boarding until it evolves into a story—a creature—that is entertaining through and through." Pete Doctor, director of *Monster's Inc.*, adds: "It's really a collaborative effort—no matter what I do, or what John [Lasseter] does, or Andrew [Stanton]—we all get together. The key to Pixar's success is that there's no *ego* guy; everyone's working together. We have these people that are just excellent painters, excellent technical guys, animators—and everybody is allowed to do what they're so great at. And that's why the films turn out so well."

But what does it take to craft masterpiece after masterpiece, film after film? There's no insurance policy that guarantees that a Pixar product will strike gold—and it certainly isn't extraordinary luck. "We try to layer things," Doctor sketches out in words. "So you have the film that hopefully keeps everyone guessing; you have a certain amount of slapstick, just funny comedy and people getting hit—kids love that; and some verbal humor and inside jokes that people who are film geeks will get that the kids probably won't. So there's a lot of different levels to the stuff going onscreen."

More importantly, though, is an amazing sense of fantasy. From *Toy Story* to *Bug's Life*, there is a universal "what if?" that relates to all sets of people, young and old, American or Japanese. What if toys could talk? What if the insect kingdom operated like a human society? What if that monster under your bed really did exist? "[The process] is really artist driven, and I think that's unlike any other studio really," Doctor indicates while looking out of the conference room window onto a crowd

"I've always been intrigued and fascinated by the idea that monsters might be living in my closet." —Pete Doctor, Director

of animators as the lunch line grows increasingly large. "John, for example, looking at *Toy Story*, had always been fascinated by toys—that's what drove him to do *Tin Toy*, the short film. It was almost like psychoanalyzing toys. Assuming they were real and alive, what are their hopes, their dreams, their desires—what are their greatest fears? It's really director driven. *Monster's* is kind of the same way; I've always been intrigued and fascinated by the idea that monsters might be living in my closet. And now, as I get older, I think about how wild it is that we, as humans, create these other realities."

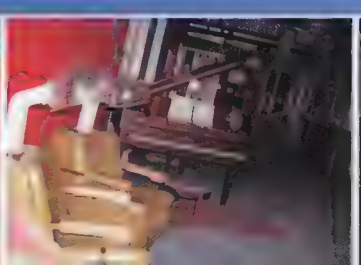
Through animation, the Pixar crew is able to take those fantasies and make them a reality. Action figures, once inflexible, are given dramatically realistic articulation, bugs are graced with detailed facial ticks, and creatures of the night, once as flat as a children's storybook, are brought into an entirely new dimension. But as the comprehensive making-of features on the *Monster's Inc.* DVD catalogs, the development of each film is a long, excruciating operation. The story begins with a seed idea, which is spun inevitably until the film's release. "We're

honing and polishing this stuff until the last minute, until beyond the last minute, until the point were we thought we couldn't do it anymore," Kinder stresses. "Because if someone has an idea that will demonstratively make it funnier, clearer, or more entertaining, everybody's going to make every effort to get that in, even if it's—according to the schedule—too late."

To describe the entire process, from beginning to end, Kinder offers an intriguing analogy: "The best comparison is to the architectural process. You start with a rendering of the house and you say, 'God, that's gonna look really great. I *love* the way that looks. Let's start making a blueprint. Let's start actually designing how the sensation I get from looking at the color pencil drawing of that house is actually going to be put together.' Then the architect does a blueprint, and then you start picking apart the blueprint and say, 'Bang out that wall, make it another foot, put a window here, make that window bigger, blah, blah, blah.' You work out all these details and then you start the construction. On a big project, the construction would probably be the briefest in the life span of the building; it's all in the design and planning that really accentuates the effort that went in. Because once you're building it, it better be right." Luckily, at this stage, Pixar has yet to see a movie collapse due to poor framework. Imagination is always present, and at least until the studio fulfills their contract with Disney (which expires in 2005 upon the release of *Cars*, a story about—what else—talking cars), there will be plenty of marketing support, too.

Using a digital medium also offers Pixar animators another distinct advantage over the traditional, Disney-esque, hand-drawn look. Besides the practically limitless amount of detail that can be pumped into each character, the environments themselves are treated like live movie sets. Unlike cel animation, Pixar creates each setting as a fully realized, three-dimensional world. It's as if the animated characters are digitized actors—they can walk, talk and play anywhere on a given set; they're not constrained to the confines of a widescreen frame. "The whole environment is built up and modeled, and think of the characters as puppets in that environment," Kinder accentuates. "You can place the cameras anywhere you want, with any lens of any focal length and any depth of field. But it's a double-edged sword. Allowing the filmmakers to treat the environment like a real one and [illegible] the frame and place the camera and make those choices as a filmmaker in a real 3D world would. On the other hand, they're not to over build, such that if they top of this building is never going to be seen, they might not spend all that time finishing the top of the building."

Ultimately, though, after all of the striking detail that is inserted into each Pixar film, the audience is still left out in the cold. It may still seem wholly amazing onscreen, but since *Monster's Inc.*, like Pixar's other movies, was created using a digital medium, when it is transferred onto 35MM film, there is still generation loss. But with digital projectors still upwards of $250,000 per rig, and DVD a highly compressed home video format, it may be a while before we view one of Pixar's babies as it was meant to be seen. "It's just a matter of time," Kinder reasonably states. "I really think that the economics will evolve so the projectors aren't as expensive. But the question is, 'How Long?' It's definitely gone slower than I would have hoped. I was involved in the digital cinema release of *Toy Story 2* which was the first film to be created digitally and then mastered and exhibited digitally. We saw how obvious it was: 'God, the images that we see on our calibrated displays, we can show 60 feet wide at the same quality—with no generation loss, no grain, no jitter, no weave, no dirt—to audiences. This is perfect.' At that point, there were only six [digital] theaters in the U.S. and that was in '99. But the projectors are expensive, and the exhibition business has been going bankrupt—all these theater chains have had a really hard time lately. And I think people are afraid, too, to make a big investment. It's like a digital camera—it will be 18 mega pixels next year. It's like buying a computer: You worry about, 'When am I going to take the plunge.' Or a videogame platform: 'Oh, the next great thing is coming. Should I wait?'" But Pixar still strives—and will always continue to strive—to bring the best that technology has to offer to audiences worldwide. Like Pete Doctor says, "so much of it is a process of discovery" and *everyone* is invited to come along for the ride. **play**



BALLISTIC: ECKS VS. SEVER
Warner Bros.
September 20

interview

CLASH OF THE AGENTS

words jon m gibson

From the trailer, *Ballistic: Ecks vs. Sever* may seem like a typical action flick—guns, gore, and gigantic explosions. But director Kaos (short for his Korean name, Wych Kaosayananda) doesn't shy away from announcing that the film hearkens back to the day of Steve McQueen and pre-Terminator Schwarzenegger. The action is entirely "practical"—the pyrotechnics are real, there are no digital enhancements, and absolutely no wires to help the actors flip off walls. So as the title suggests, the clash of agent Jeremiah Ecks (Antonio Banderas) and agent Sever (Lucy Liu)—both now removed from the government agencies that trained them—is one of pure ferocity. A new assassin device, one that is microscopic and injectable, killing its victim on command, is the prize; Kaos, Lucy Liu, and co-star Ray Park describe the chase.

First off, why the sudden title change for the movie—*Ecks vs. Sever* to *Ballistic: Ecks vs. Sever*?
Kaos: The name was always an issue. I'll be the first one to tell you, when I first saw the script as *Ecks vs. Sever*, I was like, "Why are they giving me a courtroom drama." [*laughs*] Before we filmed, we had a list of names we went through, and the one that I liked the most was *Ballistic*, but at that time it wasn't cleared—and we never thought it would be cleared—so we stuck with *Ecks vs. Sever*.

Well, since you didn't get to keep the original title, at least Ray got to flaunt his natural British accent.
Ray: Yeah, I do. It was actually nice not to think about it.
Lucy: He was gonna do it Asian, but we said, "You know what? Ray, no." [*laughs*]
Kaos: [*to Lucy*] Well, what accent did you want to do?
Lucy: I wanted to do Ray's accent. [*smiling*] I think with ten lines, with three syllables each, it's not gonna sell—you're not gonna know the accent.

Did you actually count the number of words you say in the movie, because your character is essentially a silent killing machine?
Lucy: No, but in the end, literally, the sound guy was like, "Oh my God, we get to work together!" [*laughs*] Almost three-quarters of the way through the movie, they realized I hadn't said anything.
Kaos: It was really funny, because with the amount set pieces we were doing, we'd go through stretches where there's no dialogue. Albert, our [assistant director], one day walked [on set] and goes, "Okay, just as a reminder, we are about to record sound."
Lucy: Everyone had to turn their cell phones off. [*laughs*]
Kaos: We'd gone three weeks without a single line of dialogue.

When you started working on *Ballistic*, you said you were aiming for a more methodical, more practical action movie, mixing that with the style of old-school Steve McQueen crime riffs. Have you been able to maintain that vision?
Kaos: A lot of people have a lot of different opinions. It's a blend of both, I think. The movie tends to shift a little every now and then. And even in the slower scenes—in the dialogue scenes—there's not a lot of cutting. What we have done—which we never planned on doing—was heighten the pace of the movie a little bit more. My approach to it—although we all liked it—was taking *too* much time. It's just part of the process you go through. We just shaved things here and there.

So Lucy, you're playing yet another empowered female. Did you always see yourself in that mode—clad in leather, stroking the barrel of a semi-automatic machine gun, primed to kick ass?
Lucy: No. [*giggles*]
Kaos: [*smirking*] Have dinner with her one day.
Lucy: I think from *Payback*, there was an excitement. The audience really embraced it; they thought it was funny and sexy. Then the role of Ling was written for *Ally McBeal*, and she was vicious and very smart and sexy—a modern, feminist woman. And then *Charlie's Angels* and *Shanghai Noon*, but *Shanghai Noon* wasn't really as much. The princess didn't agree with her father so she broke away from the family, but she didn't fight

the whole time. So I said to Jackie [Chan], "When do I get to fight, when do I get to fight?" And he's like, "Soon, soon." He didn't want to be bothered with me. And then at the end he goes, "Okay, fight!" And it was one kick—one kick! *[laughs]* And when I finally kicked in the movie, the audience went crazy. They were so excited about the idea that she finally came through and kicked. And I think the studios sort of realized, "Wow, you know what, we don't really have a female action person, since maybe Linda Hamilton." There's Julia Roberts and everyone else—they're very talented—but they don't think, "Put a gun in her hand." There's no doubt in the audience's mind when I come on with a gun or beat somebody up. In a way, it's really exciting because you get to do movies like *Ecks vs. Sever*—you get to work with Kaos, you get to jump off exploding buildings, you get to be really tough—and have people believe it and not worry about it. You can be in a scene and fight a man who's clearly so much bigger and so much stronger, and still eliminate or damage them, and people are still, "Yeah, okay," as opposed to, "Oh, please."

Well, if they don't buy it, the movie is shot to hell.
Lucy: When you go to a movie theater and see previews and then the audience boos, it's the worst feeling in the world. I'm thinking, "I feel so bad for that person. Do they have any idea that the audience doesn't buy them doing that at all?" And then you think, "Wait a minute, my preview's coming up soon. Jesus, what if they..."

You hit the mark, though... but to do so, there's got to be a lot of training involved?
Lucy: Oh my God, I did so much training! I did about three-and-a-half months for this movie. Not only did I have to learn all the fight scenes and learn all the different techniques, but I also did training for all the different weapons and guns... and I'd never really picked up a gun and shot it. The first day, they just said, "Oh, we want to see what gun suits you." *[everybody laughs]* I show up, we go to the firing range, and there's literally an entire room full of ammunition and giant guns—like *The Matrix*. "Just pick a couple. We'll just go through all of 'em and see which one's more comfortable for you." And I was like, *[gulp]*. So we just start shooting off and I'm like, "So these aren't blanks?" They're like, "No, no, no. This is live ammo." I was thinking—which was so terrible—if I freaked out for some reason, I could turn around and kill everyone in the room. It was so scary.
Kaos: But we do have B-roll that I taped for myself when she was doing it, and the first time she fired off a full round... the look on her face... priceless. *[laughs]*
Lucy: *[smiling, nodding her head]* It's so weird. Now I understand the idea of being empowered by guns, because you feel like nothing can touch you. **play**

"Now I understand the idea of being empowered by guns, because you feel like nothing can touch you."

The Tuxedo

Dreamworks SKG
September 27

Jackie Chan is doing what he does best again—with style. In *The Tuxedo*, he plays Jimmy Tong, a former cab driver hired as a chauffeur by mysterious millionaire Clark Devlin (Jason Isaacs). Devlin's only rule: *never* touch his prized tuxedo. But when Devlin is hospitalized after an explosive "accident," Jimmy tries on the tux and soon discovers that it fits like Inspector Gadget's trench coat—a gadget-filled, technologically advanced suit that gives him more than just Bruce Wayne charisma. Soon, Tong is fighting bad guys and wrapped in a world of espionage as he learns of Devlin's true identity—CIA; and along the way he's paired up with a beautiful agent named Del Blaine (Jennifer Love Hewitt). It all comes together in a very American envisioning of Chan's hard-kicking fantasyland: high production values, no subtitles, and stuntmen (something that Chan, who generally flies without the help of harnesses and lookalikes, had to come to terms with). **Thomas Chau**

The Transporter

20th Century Fox
September 13

"Frank's not a murderer or an assassin; he's something completely different," Jason Statham (*Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels*, *Snatch*) says of his latest onscreen persona. "I like to call Frank the 'Thinking Man's Fighting Machine' because his technique is very stylish." That style, comprised of slow-mo gun battles and a mixture of street punches and kung fu, spurs from the two primaries behind *The Transporter*: writer/producer Luc Besson (*The Fifth Element*) and director Cory Yuen (martial arts choreographer for *Romeo Must Die* and longtime veteran of the Asian cinema scene). Concerning ex-Special Forces operative Frank Martin, who is now a courier-for-hire by the criminal element (carrying cargo—human or other—with no questions asked), the film plays out like a hyper-adrenaline version of Besson's *The Professional*. The moment Frank breaks his own rules, opening the truck of his tricked-out BMW to reveal some "live cargo" (actress Shu Qi), the plot really shifts into full-throttle. **Jon M Gibson**

FASTLANE
Fox
Wednesdays 9:00-10:00 p.m. (et/pt)

ALL REVVED UP

Fox's latest hour-long action riff, *Fastlane*, proves that TV hasn't truly revved its engines until now.

words jon m gibson

"It's like an orgasm for any guy," says an excited Bill Bellamy, describing the techno-enhanced, hyper-cool sound stage he's admiring. Like any old-school cartoon, your jaw would drop, too, if you were sitting in the middle of The Candy Store. It's the storehouse for all things seized from the criminals that originally stole them—Ducatis, Ferraris, Rolexes—yet it's not your typical evidence locker. "It's a theory with a budget," Billie Chambers (Tiffani Thiessen) urges in *Fastlane*'s pilot. That's why she recruits two cops on the edge, Van Ray (Peter Facinelli) and Deaqon Hayes (Bellamy), as her human Litmus test—her "version 1.0." Rather than go undercover with a poorly tailored suit and a rusty Olds, the duo dons the most stylish threads and drives the fastest cars. It's the easiest way to get to the top of the criminal food chain.

"The hook for me was, it felt like a movie. It's very much like cinematic television. And the action—the opportunity for me to really do some great dramatic stuff outside of just a comedy. That was just the total, *total* hook for Bill Bellamy," the show's co-star blurts out without missing a beat. He's not just playing friendly actor to on-set journalist; he's visibly pumped to be attached to the project, as is the rest of the cast. Facinelli chimes in: "This is something that I thought could give people a break. Just tune in and escape for an hour. It's escape TV. But it's not silly like *Gilligan's Island*. This is something that's smartly done and has a cool element; it's just pure fun and adrenaline."

The reason for the intensity rests in the hands of creators John McNamara and McG. "I haven't really done TV before—I've been on a film path—so it was a hard decision for me to do [*Fastlane*]," Facinelli remembers. "But when I sat with McG, he said, 'Look, I don't want to make TV; I want to make an hour film every week. Do you wanna join my team?' And because the cast is so small—there's only the three of us—every week we get a whole other cast that comes in, and we get a new director. It really feels like we're shootin' a movie. It's a whole new energy. It never feels stale; it never feels like we're doin' the same old thing again." McNamara agrees: "McG is a creature of pure visual storytelling. He looks for the most dynamic situation, shapes it in his head and on the storyboards, and delivers stunning compositions and amazing performances. He is all about motion, energy and the next goal in the character's life. Most TV shows are about the sidelines; *Fastlane* is about the action on the field."

After soaring through the opening scene of the first episode, it's obvious what he's referring to—*Fastlane* is cinematic to the core. Slight slow-mo shots between cuts, heavy rock and electronica blaring, multiple scenes of action woven together with a high-energy pulse, that distinctly neo-florescent glow; each is a delectable trinket, all merging together to create McG's coined style. Add to the visceral cocktail a script that pops uncontrollably, with lines you only wish that you'd thought of first. "There's no magic bullet, no secret recipe," McNamara explains. "I like writing characters who can't wait to get their next line out, who are dying to express themselves and dominate the scene. Characters who are highly motivated, after something, hustling, charming and on the come. It's all about desire. Characters with strong desires give you a good shot at memorable moments."

"John has a way of being able to write things like that, but still be able to pull it off so it doesn't sound so scripted," Thiessen offers. "I think it's a huge key that we constantly make it as real as possible even though this show is not reality—it's a fantasy based on reality."

And without reservation, McNamara and McG are pushing that fantasy into territory unknown—at least by network TV standards. Besides wearing a striking visual coat—so supreme that even the most seemingly lethargic stretch of dialogue is brushed over with a perfect layer of gloss—*Fastlane* is undeniably sexy. Flashes of nudity are only the beginning, because lines like, "If I wanted to be bent over and doggied, I'd be barkin'," are placed conveniently all throughout the show. But it's not about shock value; *Fastlane* is built on a

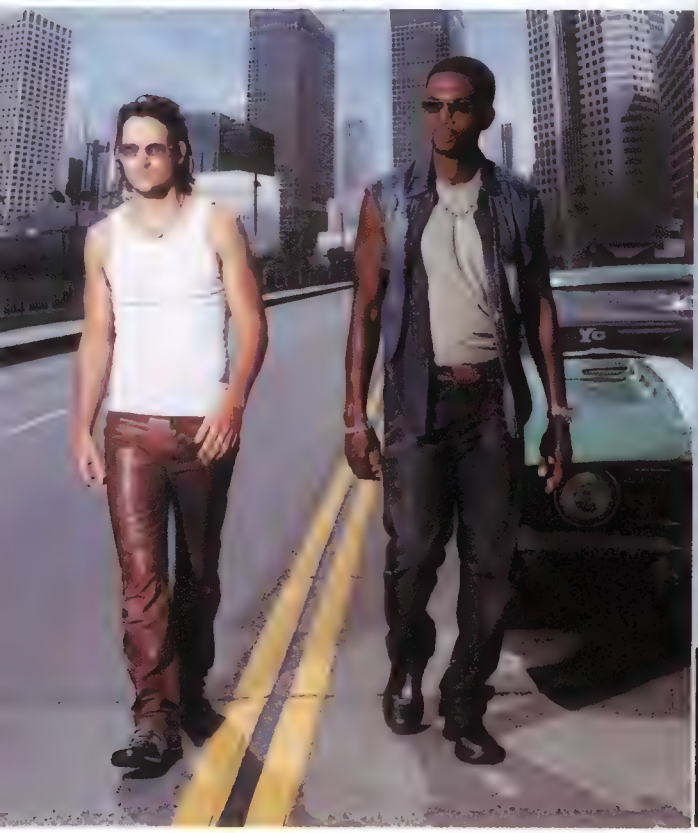
foundation of cool—cool cars, cool clothes, cool imagery, and cool dialogue. Every line is quotable, no matter how subtle.

McNamara adds to this case: "The story, first of all, is a journey. It's not about a single situation examined from all sides, like a legal drama or a terrible event that plunges characters inward, like you might see on a medical show. This is a show in which events propel the characters to act. That is an innately cinematic conceit. Don't think, don't fret, don't argue, cry, or shut down—act on your *desire*."

And most prominently, *Fastlane* is about breaking the law—about not letting the boundaries of TV today define what's ahead for tomorrow. There's plenty of copycats this fall season—in fact, it's like a disease. But *Fastlane* doesn't fit into that mold. It's unconventional, ballsy and wholly revved. When an hour-long show feels like a bathroom break, there's no denying that it has a special allure that demands multiple Tivo replays.

Bellamy, still wired on enthusiasm, closes the deal: "*Fastlane* is cinematic television with gangster strength, hot chicks and a whole lotta drama." Point and sealed. **play**

(at left) Thiessen plays the sultry woman in control; (bottom) and Facinelli and Bellamy play it cool.



"I like writing characters who can't wait to get their next line out, who are dying to express themselves and dominate the screen."

—Jana McNamara, writer/co-creator

Strip One Playmagazine

StripBot

story and art >> ashley wood
lettering >> robbie robbins

Featuring the Ashley Wood Creation

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KITTY?
KITTY. KITTY'S MUSIC HELPS US TRANSCEND THE MEDIOCRITY OF LIFE..
DUDE. KITTY. KITTY ROCKS, DRINKIN' FANNY LAGER 'N LISTENING TO 'STINK SLIT', HIS LICKASS NEW ALBUM. F*KIN' SWEET DUDE!
MMM, WELL.. I DON'T KNOW ABOUT HIS SO-CALLED MUSIC, BUT I KNOW SALES ARE UP AND HIS MERCHANDISING POTENTIAL IS ASTRONOMICAL!
I JUST WANNA SLIT HIS GUTS OPEN, SO I CAN FIND THE MAP TO BABYLON... HERE, BABYLON. YEA, I NEVER GOT CUSTARD AS A KID... BABYLON...
I WANNA LICK MOLASSES OFF HIS BALLS. IS THAT BAD?
KITTY. KITTY MIGHT HAVE A WHITE PELT BUT INSIDE HE'S A BROTHER, YEAH.
MAN, I REMEMBER GETTING HIS FIRST DEMO TAPE, BACK WHEN HE CARED, BEFORE HE SOLD OUT. NOW HE SUCKS. FRIGGIN' SHAME. SIGHHH.
DA CAT CAN CUT SOME DOPE WAX. I'ZE GOT YA BACK KITTY, AIGHT!
WAS HE IN THE BACKDOOR BOYS? GIGGLE...
I LIKE ASS, ASS FOR KITTY!
ASHLEY WOOD ©

to be continued

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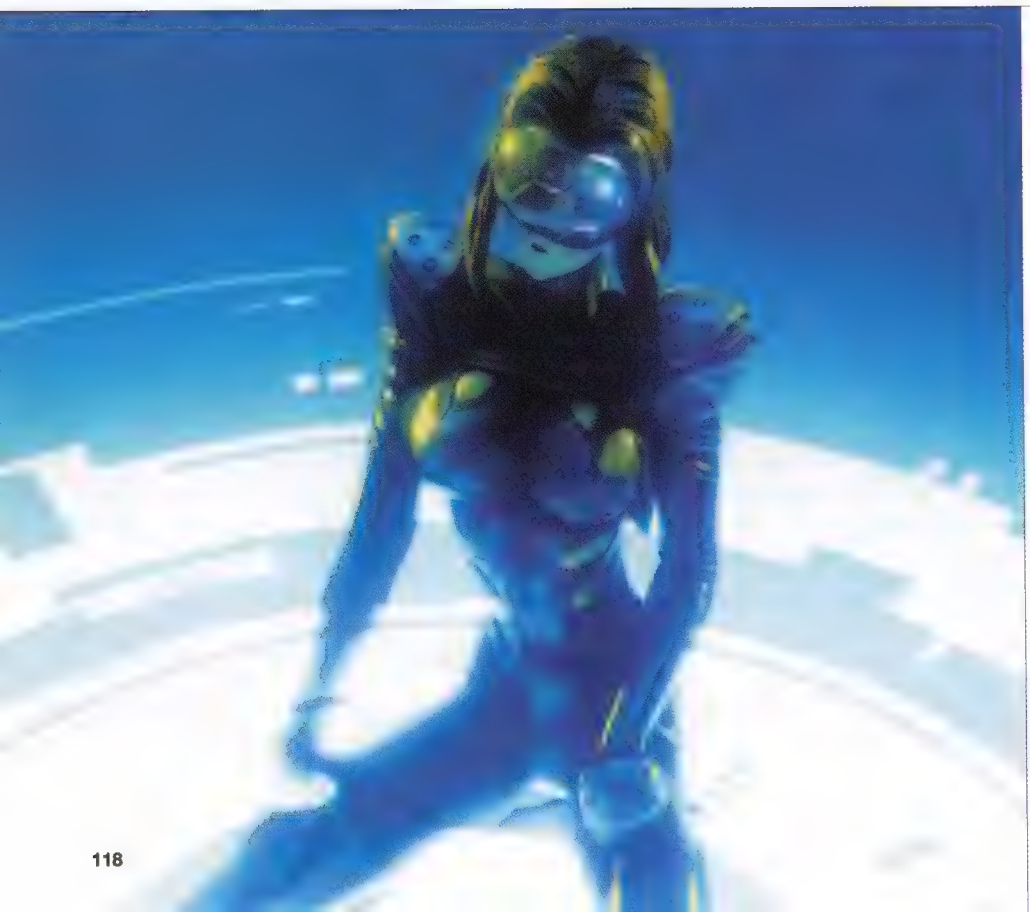

Ghost in the Shell 2 Kusanagi cold-cast resin

available now

Toshiba E740 Pocket PC

www.toshiba.com

This month we explore the world of Pocket PC's and find out why anyone would want to play games or work with a miniature keyboard and a small screen. After playing with it, we discovered why. It's really cool to be able to watch your favorite cartoon or play a videogame while sitting in class or at a business meeting undetected. Imagine your boss or instructor droning on and on about chemistry or the latest sales figures and you're playing Tiger Woods Golf.

There are lots of choices for Pocket PC's, but our hands-down favorite is the new Toshiba e740, the first to have built in Wi-Fi 802.11b wireless connectivity. Using a D-Link wireless DSL router, the Toshiba got instant access to broadband Internet. The wireless feature worked well and allowed us to surf the web and get our email from anywhere in the house, up to 300 feet from the router.

The Toshiba e740 lists for $599 and is the first handheld to offer slots for both a CompactFlash type II memory card and a Secure Digital memory card. The screen is sharp and clear with its 16-bit reflective LCD that can display 65,000 colors. It comes with a removable battery and an optional extended-life battery. Although it features the first 400 MHz processor for a Pocket PC, we didn't notice a big difference in speed over the 206 MHz in the other Pocket PC's. It comes with 64 mb of ram and an ATI imageon video chip. Included you will find Microsoft's Pocket Word and Excel, a calendar and mini contact management system. Many gaming companies are now expanding their titles to include this platform so you won't lack for gaming choices.

One of our favorite sites for the Pocket PC is Mazingo (www.mazingo.com), a subscription service, that will get you sports, news, TV previews and even episodes of classic TV shows and movies. Watching video on the Toshiba was smooth with no disruption. While the Windows CE operating system isn't perfect, it's not bad. We had an occasional freeze up but, unlike a PC, a reboot is almost instantaneous.

While there are other excellent choices in Pocket PC's, like the Compaq iPAQ and the HP Jornada, we think the addition of the wireless connectivity and the dual storage capability makes the e740 the best around.

It's so small that even the sharpest boss or most eagle-eyed teacher will still think you are taking notes instead of shooting down alien invaders. Who said education can't be fun?

See you on the trails,
Marc and Mark

Marc Cohen and Mark Gleason are the hosts of the Computer and Technology Show on KFI-AM 640. The show can be heard every Saturday morning from 10AM to 12PM in the Southern California on 640 AM. E-mail them at any time at computershow@kfi640.com or call them on air at 1-800-KFI-AM640.

gear

NOMAD MuVo

$129 (64MB) $169 (128MB)

It's smaller than a cigarette lighter, it's weight—like a feather (it's only one ounce). Even more extraordinary is the functionality of Creative's NOMAD MuVo. Two different models—64MB and 128MB—hold dozens of MP3s for the music-phile on the go. But the MuVo also moonlights as an external data drive. Simply pull the memory stick out of the battery source (it slides out with ease), stick it in your USB drive, and use it like a floppy disk (no installation required; it's plug, click and drag). Even better: One AAA alkaline powers the tiny music marvel for a full 12 hours. So loop it onto your car keys and the tunes roll.

www.creative.com

NeverWire 14

$129 per node

So you've picked up your PS2 Network Adaptor and you're now ready to get online to play a little *Madden '03*, but there's one big problem: Your broadband connection is upstairs and your PS2 is downstairs. Do you get a long RJ-45 cable, drill some holes and then fish it through your house? Never fear. All you have to do is pick up two NeverWire 14 nodes and you'll be up and running in minutes. Requiring no software, the units are literally plug and play. How does it work? The NeverWire 14 nodes are a HomePlug 1.0-compliant device, using "powerline carrier" technology to tap into the unused bandwidth in standard electrical wiring. First you plug one node into your hub or switch that is connected to your cable or DSL service. Then you plug your PS2 Network Adaptor (with the included RJ-45 cable) into the other node. Add power and you'll have an instant broadband connection. It's that simple. And when Microsoft launches Xbox Live in November, you can just buy another NeverWire 14 and plug it in. Pretty slick.

www.phonex.com

WARNING: WHEN THE GAME TURNS OFF, SO DO YOUR POWERS.

You cannot fly. You are not *stronger than a locomotive* or *faster than a speeding bullet*. You have no business attempting to use superpowers outside the realm of *Superman: Shadow of Apokolips*. Any attempt to do so will undoubtedly result in broken legs, arms, fingers and toes, sprained ankles, bruised ribs and egos, loss of limbs, pride, and ultimately-life. Just remember sport, when the game turns off, so do your powers.

INFOGRAMES™ PlayStation.2

EVERYONE E Violence CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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(s02)

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The evil Nobunaga's demon warriors wreak havoc across feudal Japan. A noble young warrior, Jubei, returns home to find his once-vibrant village laid to waste by Nobunaga's monstrous minions. Fueled by vengeance, Jubei embarks on an epic quest; one which will reveal his ultimate destiny.

BEST PS2 ADVENTURE GAME E3 2002 – IGN

ONIMUSHA™ 2
Samurai's Destiny

PlayStation®2

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MATURE M CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Violence
Blood and Gore

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